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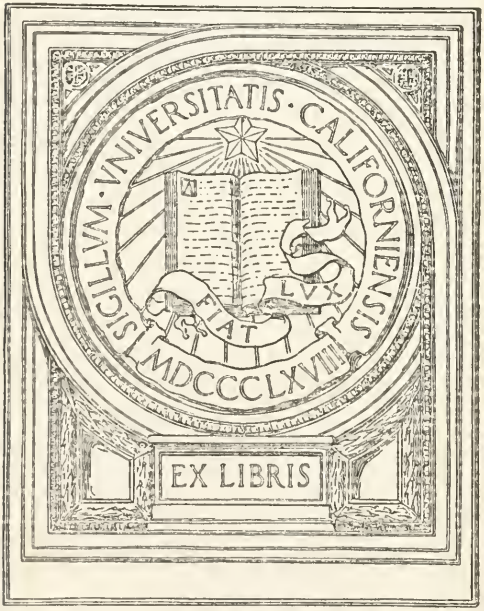

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A CHARMING FELLOW.

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BY

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"AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "MABEL'S PROGRESS,"

ETC. ETC.

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A CHARMING FELLOW.

CHAPTER I.

"So you are to come to Switzerland with us next month, Aucram," said Miss Kilfinane. She was seated at the piano in Lady Seely's drawing-room, and Algernon was leaning on the instrument, and idly turning over a portfolio of music.

"Yes; I hope your serene highness has no objection to that arrangement?"

"It would be of no use my objecting, I suppose!"

"Of none whatever. But it would be unpleasant."

"Oh, you would still go then, whether I liked it or not?"

"I'm afraid the temptation to travel about Europe in your company would be too strong for me!"

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"How silly you are, Ancram!" said Miss Kilfinane, looking up half shyly, half tenderly. But she met no answering look from Algernon. He had just come upon a song that he wanted to try, and was drawing it out from under a heap of others in the portfolio.

"Look here, Castalia," he said, "I wish you would play through this accompaniment for me. I can't manage it."

It will be seen that Algernon had become familiar enough with Miss Kilfinane to call her by her Christian-name. And, moreover, he addressed her in a little tone of authority, as being quite sure she would do what he asked her.

"This?" she said, taking the song from his hand. "Why do you want to sing this dull thing? I think Glück is so dreary! And, besides, it isn't your style at all."

"Isn't it? What is my style, I wonder?"

"Oh light, lively things are your style."

At the bottom of his mind, perhaps, Algernon thought so too. But it is often very unpleasant to hear our own secret convictions uttered by other people; and he did not like to be told that he could not sing anything more solid than a French chansonette.

"Lady Harriet particularly wishes me to try this thing of Glück's at her house next Saturday," he said.

Miss Kilfinane threw down the song pettishly. "Oh, Lady Harriet," she exclaimed. "I might have known it was her suggestion! She is so full of nonsense about her classical composers. I think she makes a fool of you, Ancram. I know it will be a failure if you attempt that song."

"Thank you very much, Miss Kilfinane! And now, having spoken your mind on the subject, will you kindly play the accompaniment?"

Algernon picked up the piece of music, smoothed it with his hand, placed it on the desk of the piano, and made a little mocking bow to Castalia. His serenity and good humour seemed to irritate her. "I'm sick of Lady Harriet!" she said, querulously, and with a shrug of the shoulders. The action and the words were so plainly indicative of ill temper, that Lady Seely, who waddled into the drawing-room at that moment, asked loudly, "What are you two quarrelling about, eh?"

"Oh, what a shocking idea, my lady! We're not quarrelling at all," answered Algernon, raising his eyebrows, and smiling with closed lips. He rarely showed his teeth when he smiled, which circumstance gave his mouth an expression of finesse and delicate irony that was peculiar, and—coupled with the candidly-arched brows—attractive.

"Well, it takes two to make a quarrel, certainly," returned my lady. "But Castalia was

scolding you, at all events. Weren't you now, Castalia?"

Castalia deigned not to reply, but tossed her head, and began to run her fingers over the keys of the piano.

"The fact is, Lady Seely," said Algernon, "that Castalia is so convinced that I shall make a mess of this aria—which Lady Harriet Dormer has asked me to sing for her next Saturday—that she declines to play the accompaniment of it for me."

"Well, you ought to be immensely flattered, young jackanapes! She wouldn't care a straw about some people's failures, would you, Castalia? Would you mind, now, if Jack Price were to sing a song and make an awful mess of it, eh?"

"As to that, it seems to me that Jack Price makes an awful mess of most things he does," replied Castalia.

"Ah, exactly! So one mess more or less don't matter. But in the case of our Admirable Crichton here, it is different."

"I think he is getting awfully spoiled," said Castalia, a little less crossly. And there was absolutely a blush upon her sallow cheek.

"And that's the reason you snub him, is it? You see, Ancram, it's all for your good, if Castalia is a little hard on you!"

Miss Kilfinane rose and left the room, saying that she must dress for her drive.

"I think Castalia is harder on Lady Harriet than on me," said Algernon, when Castalia was gone.

"Ah! H'm! Castalia has lots of good points, but—I daresay you have noticed it—she is given to being a little bit jealous when she cares about people. Now you show a decided liking for Lady Harriet's society, and you crack up her grace, and her elegance, and her taste, and all that. And sometimes I think poor Cassy don't quite like it, don't you know?"

"What on earth can it matter to her?" cried Algernon. He knew that Castalia was no favourite with my lady, and he flattered himself that he was becoming a favourite with her. So he spoke with a little half-contemptuous smile, and a shrug of impatience, when he asked, "What on earth can it matter to her?"

But my lady did not smile. She threw her head back, and looked at Algernon from under her half-closed eyelids.

"It's my opinion, young man, that it matters a good deal to Castalia," she said; "more than it would have mattered to me when I was a young lady, I can tell you. But there's no accounting for tastes."

Then Lady Seely also left the room, having first bidden Algernon to come and dine with her the next day.

Algernon was dumfoundered.

Not that he had not perceived the scornful Castalia's partiality for his charming self; not that her submission to his wishes, or even his whims, and her jealous anxiety to keep him by her side whenever there appeared to be danger of his leaving it for the company of a younger or more attractive woman, had escaped his observation. But Algernon was not fatuous enough to consider himself a lady-killer. His native good taste would alone have prevented him from having any such pretension. It was ridiculous; and it involved, almost of necessity, some affectation. And Algernon never was affected. He accepted Castalia's marked preference as the most natural thing in the world. He had been used to be petted and preferred all his life. But it truly had not entered into his head that the preference meant anything more than that Castalia found him amusing, and clever, and good-looking, and that she liked to keep so attractive a personage to herself as much as possible. For Algernon had noted the Honourable Castalia's little grudging jealousies, and he knew as well as anybody that she did not like to hear him praise Lady Harriet, for whom, indeed, she had long entertained a smouldering sort of dislike. But that she should have anything like a tender sentiment for himself, and, still more, that Lady Seely should see and approve it—for my lady's

words and manner implied no less—was a very astonishing idea indeed.

So astonishing was it, that after a while he came to the conclusion that the idea was erroneous. He turned Lady Seely's words in his mind, this way and that, and tried to look at them from all points of view, and—as words will do when too curiously scrutinised—they gradually seemed to take another and a different meaning, from the first obvious one which had struck him.

"The old woman was only giving me a hint not to annoy Miss Kilfinane; not to excite her peevish temper, or exasperate her envy."

But this solution would not quite do, either. "Lady Seely is not too fond of Castalia," he said to himself. "Besides, I never knew her particularly anxious to spare anyone's feelings. What the deuce did she mean, I wonder?"

Algernon continued to wonder at intervals all the rest of the afternoon. His mind was still busy with the same subject when he came upon Jack Price, seated in the reading-room of the club, to which he had introduced Algernon at the beginning of his London career, and of which Algernon had since become a member. It was now full summer time. The window was wide open, and the Honourable John Patrick was lounging in a chair near it, with a newspaper spread out on his knees, and his eyes fixed on a water-cart that was be-

sprinkling the dusty street outside. He looked very idle, and a little melancholy, as he sat there by himself, and he welcomed Algernon with even more than his usual effusion, asking him what he was going to do with himself, and offering to walk part of the way towards his lodgings with him, when he was told that Algernon must betake himself homeward. The offer was a measure of Mr. Price's previous weariness of spirit; for, in general, he professed to dislike walking.

"And how long is it since you saw our friend, Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs?" asked Jack Price of Algernon, as they strolled along, arm-in-arm, on the shady side of the way.

"Oh—I'm afraid it's rather a long time," said Algernon, carelessly.

"Ah, now that's bad, my dear boy. You shouldn't neglect people, you know. And our dear Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs is exceedingly pleasant."

"As to neglecting her—I don't know that I have neglected her—particularly. What more could I do than call and leave my card?"

"Call again. You wouldn't leave off going to Lady Seely's because you happened not to find her at home once in a way."

"Lady Seely is my relation."

"H'm! Well, would you cut Lady Harriet Dormer for the same reason?"

"Cut her? But, my dear Mr. Price, you

mustn't suppose that I have cut Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs!"

"Come, now, my dear fellow, I'm a great deal older than you are, and I'll take the liberty of giving you a bit of advice. Never offend people, who mean to be civil, merely because they don't happen to amuse you. What, the deuce, we can't live for amusement in this life!"

The moralising might be good, but the moralist was, Algernon thought, badly fitted with his part. He was tempted to retort on his new mentor, but he did not retort. He merely said, quietly:

"Has Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs been complaining of me, then?"

"Well, the truth is, she has—in an indirect kind of way; you know—what?"

"I'll go and see her this evening. To-day is Thursday, isn't it? She has one of her 'At home's' this evening."

Jack Price looked at the young man admiringly. "You're an uncommonly sensible fellow!" said he. "I give you my honour I never knew a fellow of your years take advice so well. By Jove! I wish I had had your common sense when I was your age. It's too late for me to do any good now, you know, what? And, in fact," (with a solemn lowering of his musical Irish voice) "I split myself on the very rock I'm now warning you off. I never was polite. And if any one told me to go to the right,

sure it was a thousand to one that I'd instantly bolt to the left!" And shaking his head with a sad, regretful gesture, Jack Price parted from Algernon at the corner of the street.

Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs received the truant very graciously that evening. She knew that, during his absence from her parties, he had been admitted into society, to which even her fashionable self could not hope to penetrate. But, though this might be a reason for a little genteel sneering at him behind his back, it was none whatever, Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs considered, for giving him a cool reception when he did grace her house with his presence. She said to several of her guests, one after the other: "We have young Ancram Errington here to-night. He's so glad to come to us, poor fellow, for my people's place is his second home, down in the West of England. And, then, the Seelys think it nice of us to take notice of him, don't you know? He is a relation of Lady Seely's, and is quite in that set—the Dormers, and all those people. Ah! you don't know them? They say he is to marry Castalia Kilfinane. But we haven't spoken about it yet out of our own little circle. Her father was Viscount Kauldkail, and married Lord Seely's youngest sister," and so on, and so on with a set smile, and no expression whatever on her smooth, fair face.

To Algernon himself she showed herself politely

inquisitive on the subject of his engagement to Castalia, and startled him considerably by saying, when she found herself close to him for a few minutes near a doorway:

"And are we really to congratulate you, Mr. Errington?"

"If you please, madam," answered Algernon, with a bright, amused smile and an easy bow, "but I should like to know—if it be not indiscreet—on what special subject? I am, indeed, to be congratulated on finding myself here. But, then, you are hardly likely to be the person to do it."

At that moment Algernon was wedged into a corner behind a fat old gentleman, who was vainly struggling to extricate himself from the crowd in front, by making a series of short plunges forward, the rebound of which sent him back on to Algernon's toes with some violence. It was very hot, and a young lady was singing out of tune in the adjoining room; her voice floating over the murmur of conversation occasionally, in a wailing long-drawn note. Altogether, it might have been suspected by some persons that Mr. Ancram Errington was laughing at his hostess, when he spoke of his position at that time as being one which called for congratulation. But Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs was the sort of woman who completely baffled irony by a serene incapability of perceiving it. And she would sooner suspect you of maligning

her, hating her, or insulting her, than of laughing at her. To this immunity from all sense of the ridiculous she owed her chief social successes; for there are occasions when some obtuseness of the faculties is useful. Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs tapped Algernon's arm lightly with her fan, as she answered, "Now Mr. Errington, that's all very well with the outside world, but you shouldn't make mysteries with us! I look upon you almost as a brother of Orlando's, I do indeed."

"You're very kind, indeed, and I'm immensely obliged to you; but, upon my word, I don't know what you mean by my making mysteries!"

"Oh, well, if you choose to keep your own counsel, of course you can do so. I will say no more." Upon which Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs proceeded to say a great deal more, and ended by plainly giving Algernon to understand that the rumour of his engagement to Miss Castalia Kilfinane had been pretty widely circulated during the last four or five weeks.

"Oh, Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs," said Algernon, laughing, "you surely never believe more than a hundredth part of what you hear? There's Mr. Price looking for me. I promised to walk home with him, it is such a lovely night. Thank you, no; not any tea! Are you ever at home about four o'clock? I shall take my chance of finding you. Good night."

Algernon was greatly puzzled. How and whence had the report of his engagement to Castalia originated? He would have been less puzzled, if not less surprised, had he known that the report had come in the first place from Lady Seely herself, who had let fall little words and hints, well understanding how they would grow and spread. He had not committed himself in his answer to Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs. He had replied to her in such a manner as to leave the truth or falsehood of the report she had mentioned an open question. He felt the consciousness of this to be a satisfaction. Some persons might say, "Well, but since the report was false, why not say so?" But Algernon always, and, as it were, instinctively, took refuge in the vague. A clear statement to which he should appear to be bound would have irked him like a tight shoe; and naturally so, since he was conscious that he should flexibly conform himself to circumstances as they might arise, and not stick with stubborn stupidity to any predetermined course of conduct, which might prove to be inconvenient.

After saying "Good night" to his hostess he elbowed his way out of the crowded rooms, and went downstairs side by side with Jack Price. The latter knew everybody present, or thought he did. And as, when he did happen to make a mistake and to greet enthusiastically some total stranger

whom he had never seen in his life before, he never acknowledged it, but persisted in declaring that he remembered the individual in question perfectly, although "the name, the name, my dear sir, or madam, has quite escaped my wretched memory!" his progress towards Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs's hall door was considerably impeded by the nods, smiles, and shakes of the hand, which he scattered broadcast.

"There's Deepville," said he to Algernon, as they passed a tall, dark, thin-faced man, with a stern jaw and a haughty carriage of the head. "Don't you know Deepville? Ah, then you should! You should really. The most delightful, lovable, charming fellow! He'd be enchanted to make your acquaintance, Errington, quite enchanted. I can answer for him. There's nothing in the world would give him greater pleasure, what?"

Algernon was by this time pretty well accustomed to Jack Price's habit of answering for the ready ecstasies of all his acquaintances with regard to each other, and merely replied that he dared to say Sir Lancelot Deepville was a very agreeable person.

"And how's the fair Castalia?" asked Jack, when they were out in the street.

"I believe she is quite well. I saw her this morning."

"Oh, I suppose you did," exclaimed Jack Price with a little smile, which Algernon thought was to be interpreted by Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs's recent revelations. But the next minute Jack added, very unexpectedly, "I had some idea, at one time, that Deepville was making up to her. But it came to nothing. She's a nice creature, is Castalia Kilfinane; a very nice creature."

Algernon could not help smiling at this disinterested praise.

"I'm afraid she does not always behave quite nicely to you, Mr. Price," he said. And he said it with a little air of apology and proprietorship which he would not have assumed yesterday.

"Oh, you're quite mistaken, my dear boy; she's as nice as possible with me. I like Castalia Kilfinane. There's a great deal of good about her, and she's well educated and clever in her way—not showy, you know, what?—but—oh, a nice creature! There's a sort of bitter twang about her, you know, that I like immensely."

"Oh, well," cried Algernon, laughing outright, "if you have a liking for bitters, indeed——"

"Ah, but she doesn't mean it. It's just a little flavour—a little *soupçon*. Oh, upon my word, I think Miss Kilfinane a thoroughly nice creature. It was a pity about Deepville now, eh, what?"

"I wonder that you never thought of trying

your fortune in that quarter yourself, Mr. Price!" said Algernon, looking at him curiously, as they passed within the glare of a street-lamp.

"Is it me? Ah, now, I thought everybody knew that I wasn't a marrying man. Besides, there never was the least probability that Miss Kilfinane would have had me—none in the world. Sure, she'd never think of looking at a bald old bachelor like myself, what?"

Algernon did not feel called on to pursue the subject. But he had a conviction that Jack Price would not, under any circumstances, have given Miss Kilfinane the chance of accepting him.

The allusion, however, seemed to have touched some long-silent chord of feeling in Jack, and set it vibrating. As they sat at supper together, Jack reverted to the sage, mentor-like tone he had assumed that morning, giving Algernon much sound advice of a worldly nature, and holding up his own case as a warning to all young men who liked to "bolt to the left when they were told to go to the right," and presenting himself in the unusual light of a gloomy and disappointed person; and when a couple of tumblers of hot punch smoked on the table, Jack grew tender and sentimental.

"Ah, my dear Errington," he said, "I wish

ye may never know what it is to be a lonely old bachelor!"

"Lonely? Why you're the most popular man in London, out-and-out!"

"Popular! And what good does that do me? If I were dead to-morrow, who'd care, do you think? Although that doesn't seem to me to be such a hard case as people say. Sure, I don't want anyone to cry when I'm dead; but I'd like 'em to care for me a little while I'm living. If I'd been my own elder brother, now; or if I'd taken advantage of my opportunities, and made a good fortune, as I might have done—— But 'twas one scrape after another I put my foot into. I did and said whatever came uppermost. And you'll find, my dear boy, that it's the foolish things that mostly do come uppermost."

"It's lucky that, amongst other foolish things, an imprudent marriage never rose to the surface," said Algernon.

"Oh, but it did! Oh, devil a doubt about it!" The combined influence of memory and hot punch brought out Jack's musical brogue with unusual emphasis. "Only, there I couldn't carry out my foolish intentions. It wasn't the will that was wanting, my dear boy."

"Providence looked after you on that occasion?"

"Providence or—or the other thing. Oh, I could tell you a love-story, only you'd be laughing at me."

"Indeed, I would not laugh!"

"On my honour, I don't know why you shouldn't! I often enough have laughed at myself. She was the sweetest, gentlest, most delicate little creature!—Snowdrop I used to call her. And as for goodness, she was steeped in it. You felt goodness in the air wherever she was, just as you smell perfume all about when the hawthorns blossom in May. Ah! now to think of me talking in that way, and my head as smooth as a billiard-ball!"

"And—and how was it? Did your people interfere to prevent the match?"

"My people! Faith, they'd have screeched to be heard from here to there if I'd made her the Honourable Mrs. Jack Price, and contaminated the blood of the Prices of Mullingar. Did ye ever hear that my great-grandfather was a whisky distiller? Bedad, he was then! And I believe he manufactured good liquor, rest his soul! But I shouldn't have cared for that, as ye may believe. But they got hold of her, and told her that I was a roving, unsteady sort of fellow; and that was true enough. And—and she married somebody else. The man she took wasn't as good-looking as I

was in those days. However, there's no accounting for these things, you know. It's fate, what? destiny! And she told me, in the pretty silver voice of hers, like a robin on a bough, that I had better forget her, and marry a lady in my own station, and live happy ever after. 'Mary,' said I, 'if I don't marry you I'll marry no woman, gentle or simple.' She didn't believe me. And I don't know that I quite believed myself. But so it turned out, you see, what? And so I was saved from a *mésalliance*, and from having, maybe, to bring up a numerous family on nothing a year; and the blood of the Prices of Mullingar is in a fine state of preservation, and Mary never became the Honourable Mrs. Jack Price. Honourable—bedad it's the Honourable Jack Price she'd have made of me if she'd taken me; an honourabler Jack than I've been without her, I'm afraid! D'ye know, Errington, I believe on my soul that, if I had married Mary, and gone off with her to Canada, and built a log-house, and looked after my pigs and my ploughs, I'd have been a happy man. But there it is, a man never knows what is really best for him until it's too late. We'll hope there are compensations to come, what? Of all the dreary, cut-throat, blue-devilish syllables in the English language, I believe those words 'too late' are the ugliest. They make a fellow

feel as if he was being strangled. So mind your p's and q's, my boy, and don't throw away your chances whilst you've got 'em!"

And thus ended Jack Price's sermon on worldly wisdom.

CHAPTER II.

Minnie Bodkin had loyally tried to keep the promise she had given to the Methodist preacher respecting Rhoda Maxfield, but in so trying she had encountered many obstacles. In the first place, Rhoda, with all her gentleness, was not frank, and she opposed a passive resistance to all Minnie's efforts to win her confidence on the subject of Algernon.

"It is like poking a little frightened animal out of its hole, trying to get anything from her!" said Minnie, impatiently.

Not that Rhoda's reticence was wholly due to timidity. She knew instinctively that she was to be warned against giving her heart to Algernon Errington; that she should hear him blamed; or, at least, that the unreasonableness of trusting in his promises, or taking his boyish love-making in serious earnest, would be safely set forth by Miss Bodkin. Rhoda had not perceived any of the wise

things which might be said against her attachment to Algernon in the beginning, but now she thought she perceived them all. And she was resolved, with a sort of timid obstinacy, not to listen to them.

"I'm sure Algy's fond of me. And even if he has changed"—the supposition brought tears into her eyes as the words framed themselves in her mind—"I don't want to have him spoken unkindly of."

But, in truth, latterly her hopes had been outweighing her fears. In most of his letters to his mother Algernon had spoken of her, and had sent her his love. He was making friends, and looking forward hopefully to getting some definite position. Even her father spoke well of Algernon now;—said how clever he was, and what grand acquaintance he was making, and how sure he would be to succeed. And once or twice her father had dropped a word which had set Rhoda's heart beating, and made the colour rush into her face, for it seemed as if the old man had some idea of her love for Algy, and approved it! All these circumstances together made Minnie's task of mentor a rather hopeless one.

And then Minnie herself, although, as has been said, loyally anxious to fulfil her promise to David Powell, began to think that he had overrated the importance of interfering with Rhoda's love-story

if love-story it were. Powell lived in a state of exalted and, perhaps, overstrained feeling, and attributed his own earnestness to slighter natures. Of course, on the side of worldly wisdom there was much to be said against Rhoda's fancying herself engaged to Algernon Errington. There was much to be said; and yet Minnie did not feel quite sure that the idea was so preposterous as Powell had appeared to think it. True, Mrs. Errington was vain, and worldly, and ambitious for her son. True, Algernon was volatile, selfish, and little more than twenty years of age. But still there was one solid fact to be taken into account, which, Minnie thought, might be made to outweigh all the obstacles to a marriage between the two young people—the solid fact, namely, of old Maxfield's money.

"If Algernon married a wife with a good dower, and if the wife were as pretty, as graceful, and as well-mannered as Rhoda, I do not suppose that anybody would concern himself particularly with her pedigree," thought Minnie. "And even if any one did, that difficulty would not be insuperable, for I have no knowledge of Mrs. Errington, if within three months of the wedding she had not invented a genealogy, only second to her own, for her son's wife, and persuaded herself of its genuineness into the bargain!"

As to those other convictions which would have made such a marriage horrible to David

Powell, even had it been made with the hearty approval of all the godless world, Minnie did not share them. She did not believe that Rhoda's character had any spiritual depth; and she thought it likely enough that she would be able to make Algernon happy, and to be happy as his wife. "Algy is not base, or cruel, or vicious," she said to herself. "He has merely the faults of a spoiled child. A woman with more earnestness than Rhoda has would weary him; and a wiser woman might, in the long run, be wearied by him. She is pretty, and sufficiently intelligent to make a good audience, and so humble-minded that she would never be exacting, but would gratefully accept any scraps of kindness and affection which Algy might feel inclined to bestow on her. And that would react upon him, and make him bestow bigger scraps for the pleasure of being adored for his generosity."

And there were times when she felt very angry with Rhoda;—Rhoda, who turned away from the better to choose the worse, and who was coldly insensible to the fact that Matthew Diamond was in love with her. Nay, had she been cognisant of the fact, she would, Minnie felt sure, have shrank away from the grave, clever gentleman who, as it was, could win nothing warmer from her than a sort of submissive endurance of his presence, and a humble acknowledgment that he

was very kind to take notice of an ignorant little thing like her.

It was with strangely mingled feelings that Minnie, watching day by day from her sofa or easy-chair, perceived the girl's utter indifference to Diamond. How much would Minnie have given for one of those rare sweet smiles to beam upon her, which were wasted on Rhoda's pretty, shy, downcast face! How happy it would have made her to hear those clear, incisive tones lowered into soft indistinctness for her ears, as they so often were for Rhoda's, who would look timid and tired, and answer, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," until Minnie's nervous sympathy with Diamond's disappointment, and irritation against him for being disappointed, grew almost beyond her own control.

One May evening, when the cuckoo was sending his voice across the purling Whit from distant Pudcombe Woods, and the hyacinths in Minnie's special flower-stand were pouring out their silent evensong in waves of perfume, five persons were sitting in Mrs. Bodkin's drawing-room, the windows of which looked towards the west. They were listening to the cuckoo, and smelling the sweet breath of the hyacinths, and gazing at the rosy sky, and dropping now and then a soft word, which seemed to enhance the sweetness and the silence of the room. The five persons were Minnie Bodkin,

Rhoda Maxfield, Matthew Diamond, Mr. Warlock (the curate of St. Chad's), and Miss Chubb. The latter was embroidering something in Berlin wools, as usual; but the peace of the place, and of the hour, seemed to have fallen on her, as on the rest, and she sat with her work in her lap, looking across the stand of hyacinths, very still and quiet.

The Reverend Peter also sat looking silently across the hyacinths, but it was at the owner. Minnie's cheek rested on her thin white hand, and her lustrous eyes had a far-away look in them, as they gazed out towards Pudcombe Woods, where the cuckoo was calling his poet-loved syllables with a sweet, clear tone, that seemed to have gathered all the spirit of the spring into one woodland voice.

Rhoda sat beside the window, and was sewing very gently and noiselessly, but seemingly intent upon her work, and unconscious that the eyes of Mr. Diamond—who was seated close to Minnie's chair—were fixed upon her, and that in some vague way he was attributing to her the perfume of the flowers, and the melancholy-sweet note of the bird, and the melted rubies of the western sky.

"What a sunset!" said Miss Chubb, breaking the silence. But she spoke almost in a whisper, and her voice did not startle any ear. Mr.

Warlock, habituated to suppress his feelings and adapt his words to those of his company, answered, after a little pause, "Lovely indeed! It is an evening to awaken the sensibilities of a feeling heart."

"It makes me think of Manchester Square. We had some hyacinths in pots, too, I remember, when I was staying with the Bishop of Plumbunn."

Miss Chubb's odd association of ideas was merely due to the fact that her thoughts were flying back to the rose-garden of youth.

"Do you not like to hear the cuckoo, Miss Bodkin?" said Diamond, softly, speaking almost in her ear. She started, and turned her head towards him.

"Yes; no. I like it, although it makes me sad. I like it because it makes me sad perhaps."

"All sights, and sounds, and scents seem to me to be combined this evening into something sweeter than words can say."

"It is a fine evening, and the cuckoo is calling from Pudcombe Woods, and my hyacinths are of a very good sort. It seems to me that words can manage to say that much with distinctness!"

"What a pity," thought Diamond, "that head overshadows heart in this attractive woman! She is too keen, too cool, too critical. A woman without softness and sentiment is an unpleasant phenomenon. And I think she has grown harder in her

manner than she used to be." Then the reflection crossed his mind that her health had been more frail and uncertain than usual of late, and that she bore much physical suffering with high courage; and the little prick of resentment he had begun to feel was at once mollified. He answered aloud, with a slow smile, "Why, yes, words may manage to say all that. I wonder if I may ask you a question? It is one I have long wished to ask."

"You may, certainly."

"There are questions that should not be asked."

"I will trust you not to ask any such."

"Now when she looks and speaks like that, she is adorable!" thought Diamond, meeting the soft light of Minnie's lovely, pathetic eyes, which fell immediately before his own. "I wish I might have you for a friend, Miss Bodkin," he said.

"I think you have your wish. I thought you knew you had it."

"Ah, yes; you are always good, and kind, and —and—but you—I will make a clean breast of it, and pay you the compliment of telling you the truth. I have thought latterly that you were hardly so cordial, so frank in your kindness to me as you once were. It would matter nothing to me in another person, but in you, a little shade of manner matters a great deal. I don't believe there is another human being to whom I would say so

much. For I am—as perhaps you know—a man little given to thrust myself where I am not welcome."

"You are about the proudest and most distant person I ever knew, and require to be very obviously implored before you condescend to easy friendship with anyone."

Minnie laughed, as she spoke, a little low rippling laugh, which she ended with a forced cough, to hide the sob in her throat.

"No; not proud. You misjudge me; but it is true that I dread, almost more than anything else, being deemed intrusive."

"If that fear has prevented you from putting the question to which you have so long desired an answer, pray ask it forthwith."

"I think it has almost answered itself," said Diamond, bending over her, and turning his chair so as to cut her and himself off still more from the others. "I was going to ask you if I had unwittingly offended you in any way, or if my frequent presence here were, for any reason, irksome to you? It might well be so. And if you would say so candidly, believe me, I should feel not the smallest resentment. Sorrow I should feel. I can't deny it; but I should not cease to regard you as I have always regarded you from the beginning of our acquaintance. How highly that is, I have

not the gift to tell; nor do you love the direct, broadly-spoken praise that sounds like flattery, be it ever so sincere."

"No; please don't praise me," said Minnie, huskily. She was shadowed by his figure as he sat beside her, and so he did not see the tears that quivered in her eyes. After a second or two, during which she had passed her handkerchief quickly, almost stealthily, across her face, she said, "But your question, you say, has answered itself."

"I hope so; I hope I may believe that there is nothing wrong between us."

"Nothing."

"I have not offended you in any way!"

"No."

"Nor unwittingly hurt you? I daresay I am awkward and abrupt sometimes."

"Pray believe that I have nothing in the world to blame you for."

"Thank you. I know you speak sincerely. Your friendship is very precious to me."

She answered nothing, but hesitatingly put out her hand, which he grasped for an instant, and would have raised to his lips, but that she drew it suddenly away, murmuring something about her cushions being awry, and trying tremblingly to rearrange them.

He moved the cushions that supported her shoulders with a tender, careful touch, and placed

them so that her posture in the lounging-chair might be easier. She clasped her hands together and laid her head back wearily.

"You don't know how precious your friendship is to me," he went on lowering his voice still more. "I never had a sister. But I have often thought how sweet the companionship of a sister must be. I am very much alone in the world; and, if I dared, I would speak to you with fraternal confidence."

"Pray speak so," answered Minnie, almost in a whisper. "I should like—to be—of some comfort to you."

There was a silence. It was scarcely broken by Miss Chubb's murmured remark to Mr. Warlock, that the moon was beginning to make a ring of light behind the poplar trees on the other side of the Whit, like the halo round the head of a saint. The twilight deepened, Rhoda's fingers ceased to ply the needle, but she remained at the window looking over at the moonlit poplars, while Miss Chubb's voice softly droned out some rambling speech, which jarred no more on the quietude of the hour than did the ripple of the river.

"You have been so good to her!" said Diamond suddenly, under cover of this murmur; and then paused for a moment as if awaiting a reply. Minnie did not speak. Presently he went on.

"You know her and understand her better than any of the people here."

"I think every one likes Rhoda," said Minnie at length.

"Yes," Diamond answered eagerly. "Yes; do they not? But it requires the delicate tact of a refined woman to overcome her shyness. I never saw so timid a creature. Has it not struck you as strange that she should have come out from that vulgar home so entirely free from vulgarity?"

"Rhoda has great natural refinement."

"You appreciate her thoroughly. And, then, the repulsive and ludicrous side of Methodism has not touched her at all. It is marvellous to me to see her so perfect in grace and sweetness."

"I do not think that Methodism has ever taken deep hold on Rhoda."

"And yet it is strange that it should be so. She was exposed to the influence of David Powell. And, although he has fine qualities, he is ignorant and fanatical."

"His ignorance and fanaticism are mere spots on the sun!" cried Minnie. And now, as she spoke, her voice was stronger, and she raised her head from the cushion. "In his presence the Scripture phrase, 'A burning and a shining light,' kept recurring to me. How poor and dark one's little selfish self seems beside him!"

Diamond slightly raised his eyebrows as he answered, "Powell has undoubtedly very genuine enthusiasm and fervour. But he might be a dangerous guide to undisciplined minds."

"He would sacrifice himself, he does sacrifice himself, for undisciplined and ungrateful minds, with whom, I own, my egotism could not bear so patiently."

But it was not of Powell that Matthew Diamond wished to speak now. Under the softening influences of the twilight, and the unaccustomed charm of pouring out the fulness of his heart to such a confidante as Minnie, he could talk of nothing but Rhoda.

"Perhaps I am a fool to keep singeing my wings," he said. "It may be all in vain. But don't you believe that a strong and genuine love is almost sure to win a woman's heart, provided the woman's heart is free to be won?"

"Perhaps—provided——"

"And you do not think hers is free?"

"How can I answer you?"

"I know that Powell thought there was some one trifling with her affections. It was on that subject that he begged for the interview with you. I have never asked any questions about that interview, but I have guessed since, from many little signs and tokens, that the person he had in his mind was young Errington."

"Yes."

"Then the matter cannot be serious. He was little more than a boy when he left Whitford."

"But Rhoda was turned nineteen when Algernon went away."

Diamond started eagerly forward, with his hand on the arm of the chair, and fixing his eyes anxiously on her face, said:

"Minnie, tell me the truth! Do you think she cares for him?"

It was the first time he had ever addressed Minnie by her Christian-name; and she marked the fact with a chilly feeling at the heart. "You ask for the truth?" she said, sadly. "Yes; I do think so."

Diamond leant his head on his hand for a minute in silence. Then he raised his face again and answered, "Thank you for answering with sincerity. But I knew you would do no otherwise. This feeling for Algernon must be half made up of childish memories. I cannot believe it is an earnest sentiment that will endure."

"Nothing endures."

"If I know myself at all, my love will endure. I am a resolute man, and do not much regard external obstacles. The only essential point is, can she ever be brought to care for me?"

There was a pause.

"Do you think she might—some day?"

"Is that the only essential point?"

"Yes; to me it is so. I do believe that it would be for her happiness to care for me, rather than for that selfish young fellow."

"And—for your happiness——?"

"Oh, of that I am not doubtful at all!"

"There's the moon above the poplar trees!" cried Miss Chubb. And as she spoke a silver beam stole into the room and lighted one or two faces, leaving the others in shadow. Amongst the faces so illuminated was Minnie Bodkin's. "Did you ever see anything so beautiful as Minnie's countenance in the moonlight?" whispered Miss Chubb to the curate. "She looks like a spirit!"

Poor Mr. Warlock sighed. He had been envying Diamond his long confidential conversation with the doctor's daughter. "She is always beautiful," he replied. "But I think she looks unusually sad to-night."

"That's the moon, my dear sir! Bless you, it always gives a pensive expression to the eyes; always!" And Miss Chubb cast her own eyes upwards towards the sky as she spoke.

"Dear me, you have no lamp here!" said a voice, which, though mellow and musical in quality, was too loud and out of harmony with the twilight mood of the occupants of the drawing-room to be pleasant.

"Is not that silver lamp aloft there sufficient, Mrs. Errington?" asked Diamond.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Diamond," returned Mrs. Errington, with perhaps an extra tone of condescension, for she thought in her heart that the tutor was a little spoiled in Whitford society. "I can hardly make out who's who. Oh, there's Miss Chubb and Mr. Warlock, and—oh, is that you, Rhoda? Well, Minnie, I left your mamma giving the doctor his tea in the study, and she sent me upstairs. And, if you have no objection, I should like the lamp lit, for I am going to read you a letter from Algy."

CHAPTER III.

"Now isn't that charming?" said Mrs. Errington, finishing a paragraph descriptive of some brilliant evening party at which Algernon had been present, and looking round triumphantly at her audience.

"Very, indeed," said Minnie, who had been specially appealed to.

"Quite a graphic picture of the bow mong," said Miss Chubb. "I know all about that sort of society, so I can answer for the correctness of Algy's description."

Miss Chubb had the discretion to lower her voice as she made the latter remark, so that no one heard it save Mr. Warlock, and thus Mrs. Errington was not challenged to contradiction.

"How well Algernon writes," observed Mr. Diamond. "He has the trick of the thing so neatly, and puts out what he has to say so effectively! I wonder he has never thought of turning his pen to profit."

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"My son, sir, has other views," returned Mrs. Errington loftily. "But as to what you are pleased to call 'the trick of the thing,' I can assure you that literary talent is hereditary in our family. I don't know, my dear Minnie, whether you have happened to hear me mention it, but my great uncle by the mother's side was a most distinguished author."

"Really?"

"What did he write?" asked Miss Chubb, with much distinctness. But Mrs. Errington took no heed of the question. "And my own father's letters were considered models of style," she continued. "A large number of them are, I believe, still preserved in the family archives at Ancram Park."

"How did they come there?" asked Miss Chubb. "Unless he wrote letters to himself, they must have been scattered about here and there."

"They were collected after his death, Miss Chubb. You may not be aware, perhaps, that it is not an unfrequent custom to collect the correspondence of eminent men. It was done in the case of Walpole. And—Mr. Diamond will correct me if I am wrong—in that of the celebrated Persian gentleman, whose letters are so well known. Mirza was the name, I think?"

Miss Chubb felt herself on unsafe ground here, and did not venture farther.

"Well, at all events, Algernon appears to be getting on admirably in London," said the Reverend Peter, pacifically.

Minnie threw him an approving glance, for his good-natured words dispelled a little cloud on Miss Chubb's brow, and brought down Mrs. Errington from her high horse to the level of friendly sympathies. "Oh, he is getting on wonderfully, dear fellow!" said she.

"I'm sure we are all glad to hear of Algy's doing well, and being happy. He is such a nice, genial, unaffected creature! And never gave himself any airs!" said Miss Chubb, with a sidelong toss of her head and a little unnecessary emphasis.

"Oh no, my dear. That sort of vulgar pretension is not found among folks who come of a real good ancient stock," replied Mrs. Errington, with superb complacency.

"And we are not to have the pleasure of seeing Algernon back among us this summer?" said Mr. Warlock. In general he shrank from much conversation with Mrs. Errington, whom he found somewhat overwhelming; but he would have nerved himself to greater efforts than talking to that thick-skinned lady for the sake of a kind look from Minnie Bodkin.

"Oh, impossible! Quite out of the question. He is sorry, of course. And I am sorry. But it

would be cruel in him to desert poor dear Seely, when he is so anxious to have him with him all the summer!"

"Is there anything the matter with Lord Seely?" asked Minnie.

"N—no, my dear. Nothing but a little overwork. The mental strain of a man in his position is very severe, and he depends so on Algy! And so does dear Lady Seely. I ought almost to feel jealous. They say openly that they look on him quite as a son."

"It's a pity they haven't a daughter, isn't it?" said Miss Chubb.

Mrs. Errington did not catch the force of the hint. She answered placidly, "They have an adopted daughter; a niece of my lord's, who is almost always with them."

"Oh, indeed," said Diamond, quickly. "I had not heard that!"

Mrs. Errington bestowed a stolid, china-blue stare on him before replying, "I daresay not, sir."

The fact was that Mrs. Errington had not known it herself until quite recently; for Algernon, either mistrusting his mother's prudence—or for some other reason—had passed lightly over Castalia's name in his letters, and for some time had not even mentioned that she was an inmate of Lord Seely's house. In his latter letters he had spoken of Miss Kilfinane, but in terms purposely chosen

to check, as far as possible, any match-making flights of fancy, which his mother might indulge in with reference to that lady.

"I am not sure, my dear," proceeded Mrs. Errington, turning to Minnie, "whether I have happened to mention it to you, but Castalia—the Honourable Castalia Kilfinane, only daughter of Lord Kauldkail—is staying with the dear Seelys. But as she is rather sickly, and not very young, she cannot, of course, be to them what Algy is."

"Oh! Not very young?" said Miss Chubb, in a tone of disappointment.

"Well, not very young, comparatively speaking, Miss Chubb. She might be considered young compared with you and me, I daresay."

Fortunately, perhaps, for the preservation of peace, much imperilled by this last speech of Mrs. Errington's, Dr. Bodkin and his wife here entered the drawing-room. Although it was May, and the temperature was mild for the season, a good fire blazed in the grate; and on the rug in front of it Dr. Bodkin, after saluting the assembled company, took up his accustomed station. Diamond rose, and stood leaning on the mantel-shelf near to his chief (an action which Mrs. Errington viewed with disfavour, as indicating on the part of the second master at the Grammar School a too great ease, and absence of due subjection in the presence of his superiors), and the Reverend Peter and Miss

Chubb drew their chairs nearer to the fireplace, thus bringing the scattered members of the party into a more sociable circle. The doctor was understood to object to his society being broken up into groups of two or three, and to prefer general conversation; which, indeed, afforded better opportunities for haranguing, and for looking at the company as a class brought up for examination, and, if needful, correction, according to the doctor's habit of mind. Only Rhoda remained at her window, apart from the others, and Dr. Bodkin, seeing her there, called to her to come nearer.

"What, little Primrose!" said the doctor, kindly. "Don't stay there looking at the moon. She is chillier and not so cosy as the coal fire. Draw the curtain, and shut her out, and come nearer to us all."

Rhoda obeyed, blushing deeply as she advanced within the range of the lamp-light, and looking so pretty and timid that the doctor began smilingly to murmur into Diamond's ear something about "*Hinnuleo similis, non sine vano burarum et siluæ metu.*"

The doctor's prejudice against Rhoda had long been overcome, and she had grown to be a pet of his, in so far as so awful a personage as the doctor was capable of petting any one. To this result the conversion to orthodoxy of the Maxfield family

may have contributed. But, possibly, Rhoda's regular attendance at St. Chad's might have been inefficacious to win the doctor's favour, good churchman though he was, without some assistance from her blooming complexion, soft hazel eyes, and graceful, winning manners.

The girl came forward bashfully into the circle around the fire, and nestled herself down on a low seat between Mrs. Errington and Mrs. Bodkin. A month ago her place in that drawing-room would have been beside Minnie's chair. But lately, by some subtle instinct, Rhoda had a little shrunk from her former intimacy with the young lady. She was sensitive enough to feel the existence of some unexpressed disapproval of herself in Minnie's mind.

"We have been hearing a letter of Algernon's, papa," said Minnie.

"Have you? have you?"

"Mrs. Errington has been kind enough to read it to us."

The doctor left his post of vantage on the hearth-rug for an instant, went to his daughter, and, bending down, kissed her on the forehead. "Pretty well this evening, my darling?" said he. Minnie caught her father's hand as he was moving away again and pressed it to her lips. "Thank God for you and mother," she whispered. Minnie was not given to demonstrations of tenderness,

having been rather accustomed, like most idolised children, to accept her parents' anxious affection as she accepted her daily bread—that is to say, as a matter of course. But there was something in her heart now which made her keenly alive to the preciousness of that abounding and unselfish devotion.

"I think it is quite touching to see that father and daughter together," said Miss Chubb confidentially to her neighbour the curate. "So severe a man as the doctor is in general! Quite the churchman! Combined with the scholastic dignitary, you know. And yet, with Minnie, as gentle as a woman."

As to Mr. Warlock, the tears were in his eyes, and he unaffectedly wiped them away, answering Miss Chubb only by a nod.

"And what," said the doctor, when he had resumed his usual place, and his usual manner, "what is the news from our young friend, Algernon?"

Mrs. Errington began to recapitulate some of the items in her son's last letter—the "lords and ladies gay" whose society he frequented; the brilliant compliments that were paid him by word and deed; and the immense success which his talents and attractions met with everywhere.

"Yes; and Algernon is kindly received by

other sorts and conditions of men besides the aristocracy of this realm," said Minnie, with a little ironical smile. "He has shone in evening receptions at Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs's, and sipped lawyer Leadbeater's port-wine with appreciative gusto."

"He has to be civil to people, you know, my dear," said Mrs. Errington, smoothly. "It wouldn't do to neglect—a—a—persons who mean to be attentive, merely because they are not quite in our own set."

"I trust not, indeed, madam!" exclaimed the doctor, with protruding lips and frowning brow. "It would be exceedingly impolitic in Algernon to turn away from proffered kindness. But I will not put the matter on that ground. I should be sorry to think that a youth who has been—I may say—formed and brought up under my tuition, could be capable of ignoble and ungentlemanlike behaviour."

Mrs. Bodkin glanced a little apprehensively at Mrs. Errington after this explosion of the doctor's. But that descendant of all the Ancrams had not the slightest idea of being offended. She was smiling with much complacency, and answered mellifluously to the doctor's thunder, "Thank you, Dr. Bodkin. Now that is so nice in you to appreciate Algy as you do! He is, and ever was,

like his ancestors before him, the soul of gentlemanliness."

"Algernon was always most popular, I'm sure," said Miss Chubb. "He was a favourite with everybody. Such lively manners! And at home with all classes!"

"Yes," said Diamond in a low voice. "*Superis Deorum gratus, et imis.*"

"Now what may that mean?" asked Miss Chubb, who had quick ears.

"The words were applied to a mythological personage of very flexible talents, madam," replied Diamond.

"Oh, mythological? Well, I never went very far into mythology. Now, it's a singular circumstance, which has often struck me, and perhaps some of you learned gentlemen may be able to explain it, that none of the studies in 'ology' ever seemed to have much attraction for me; whereas the 'ographies' always interested me very much. There was geography, now. I used to know the names of all the European rivers when I was quite a child. And orthography and biography. We had a translation of Pluto's Lives at the rectory, and I was uncommonly fond of them. But, as to the 'ologies,' I frankly own that I know nothing about them."

The effect of this speech of Miss Chubb's was

much heightened by the mute commentary of Dr. Bodkin's face during its utterance. When she came to Pluto's Lives, the scholastic eyes rolled round on Mr. Diamond and the curate with an expression of such helpless indignation, that the former was driven to blow his nose with violence, in order to smother an explosion of laughter. And even Mr. Warlock's sombre brow relaxed, and he ventured to steal a smiling glance at Minnie.

But Minnie did not return the glance. She had shaded her eyes with her hand, and was leaning back in her chair, unheeding the conversation that was going on around her.

"But now, really, you know, there must be some reason for these things, if philosophers could only find it out," pursued Miss Chubb, cheerfully. "Mustn't there, Minnie?"

"Eh? I beg your pardon!"

"Oh you naughty, absent girl! You have not heard a word I've been saying. I was merely remarking that——"

But at this point Dr. Bodkin's patience suddenly snapped. He found himself unable silently to endure a recapitulation of Miss Chubb's views as to the comparative attractions of the "ologies" and the "ographies;" and he abruptly demanded of his wife, in the magisterial tones which had

often struck awe into the hearts of the lowest form, "Laura, are we not to have our rubber before midnight? Pray make up the table in the next room. There are—let me see!—Mrs. Errington, Miss Chubb, you will take a hand, Laura? We are just a quartet." And the doctor, giving his arm to Mrs. Errington, marched off to the whist-table.

On this occasion Mr. Warlock escaped being obliged to play. Indeed, the curate's assistance at whist was only called into requisition when a second table besides the doctor's had to be made up; for, although Dr. Bodkin co-operated very comfortably with his curate in all church matters, he found himself not altogether able to do so at the green table, the Reverend Peter's notions of whist being confused and elementary. To be sure, Mrs. Bodkin was not a much better player than the curate; but then she offered the compensating advantage of enduring an unlimited amount of scolding—whether as partner or adversary—without resenting it.

So Diamond, and Warlock, and Minnie, and Rhoda remained in the big drawing-room when their elders had left it. Minnie had the lamp shaded, and the curtains opened, so that the full clear light of the climbing moon poured freely into the room. Warlock timidly drew near to Miss

Bodkin's chair, and ventured to say a word or two now and then, to which he received answers so kind and gracious, that the poor fellow's heart swelled with gratitude, and perhaps with hope, for hope is very cunning and stealthy, and hides herself under all sorts of unlikely feelings.

Minnie had grown much more gentle and patient with the awkward, plain, rather dull curate of late. She listened to his talk and replied to it. And all the while she was taking eager cognisance, with eye and ear, of the two who sat side by side near the window, Diamond bending down to speak softly to Rhoda, and the girl's delicate face, white and sprite-like in the moonlight, turning now and then towards her companion with a pretty, languid gesture. Once or twice Rhoda laughed at something Diamond said to her. Her laugh was perhaps a little suggestive of silliness, but it was low, and musical, and rippling; and it was not too frequent.

Minnie sat with her hands clasped in her lap; and when she was carried to her own room that night, Jane exclaimed, as she removed her young mistress's ornaments, "Goodness, Miss Minnie, what have you done to yourself? Why that diamond ring you wear has made a desperate mark in your finger. It looks as if it had been driven right into the flesh, as hard as could be!"

Minnie held up her thin white hand to the light, and looked at it strangely.

"Ah!" said she, "I must have pressed and twisted the ring about, unconsciously. I was thinking of something else."

CHAPTER IV.

Time passed, or seemed to pass, with unusual gentleness over Whitford. If some of our acquaintances there had suddenly been called upon to mention the changes that had taken place within two years, they would perhaps have said at first that there had been none. But changes there had been, nevertheless; and by a few dwellers in the little town they had been keenly felt.

The second summer vacation after that happy holiday time which Rhoda had passed with the Erringtons at Llanryddan arrived. A hot July, winged with thunder-clouds, brooded over the meadows by the Whit. The shadow of Pudcombe Woods was pleasant in the sultry afternoons, and the cattle stood for hours knee-deep in dark pools, overhung by drooping boughs. The great schoolroom at the Grammar School resounded no more with the tread of young feet, or the murmur of young voices. It was empty, and silent, and

dusty; and an overgrown spider had thrown his grey tapestry right across the oriel window, so that it was painted, warp and woof, with brave purple and ruby blazonries from the old stained glass.

Dr. Bodkin and his family were away at a seaside place in the South of England. Mr. Diamond had gone on a solitary excursion afoot. Even Pudcombe Hall was deserted; although young Pawkins was expected to return thither, later in the season, for the shooting. Rhoda Maxfield had been sent to her half-brother Seth, at Duckwell Farm, to get strong and sunburned; and as she was allowed to be by herself almost as much as she wished—Mrs. Seth Maxfield being a bustling, active woman, who would not have thought of suspending or modifying her daily avocations for the sake of entertaining any visitor whatever—Rhoda spent her time, not unhappily, in a sort of continuous day-dream, sitting with a book of poetry under a hedge in the hayfield, or wandering with her little nephew, Seth Maxfield the younger, in Pudcombe Woods, which were near her brother's farm. She liked looking back better than looking forward, perhaps; and enacted in her imagination many a scene that had occurred at dear Llanryddan over and over again. But still there were many times when she indulged in hopeful anticipations as to Algy's return. He had come back to London after his foreign travel, and had

spent another brilliant season under the patronage of his great relations. And then a rumour had reached Whitford that Lord Seely had at length obtained the promise of a good post for him, and that he might be expected to revisit Whitford in the autumn at latest. Mrs. Errington had been invited to a country house of Lord Seely's, in Westmoreland, to meet her son, and had set out on her visit in high spirits. Rhoda was thus cut off from hearing frequently of Algernon, through his mother, but she looked forward to seeing them together in September. Rhoda missed her friend and patroness; but she missed her less at Duckwell than she would have done in the dull house in the High Street.

On the whole, she was not unhappy during those sultry summer weeks. Modest and humble-minded as she was, she had come to understand that she was considered pretty and pleasing by the ladies and gentlemen whose acquaintance she had made. No caressing words, no flattering epithets, no pet names, had been bestowed upon her by her father's old friends and companions. She was just simply Rhoda Maxfield to them; never "Primrose," or "Pretty one," or "Rhoda dear;" and the Methodists, however blind to her attractive qualities, had displayed considerable vigilance in pointing out her backsliding, and exhorting her to make every effort to become convinced of sin.

Certainly the society of ladies and gentlemen wa infinitely more agreeable.

Then, too, there had dawned on her some idea that Mr. Diamond felt a warm admiration for her—perhaps something even warmer than admiration. Miss Chubb (who delighted to foster any amatory sentiments which she might observe in the young persons around her, and was fond of saying, with a languishing droop of her plump, rubicund, good-humoured countenance, that she would not for the world see other young hearts blighted by early disappointment, as hers had been) had dropped several hints to that effect sufficiently broad to be understood even by the bashful Rhoda. And, a little to her own surprise, Rhoda had felt something like gratification, in consequence; Mr. Diamond was such a very clever gentleman. Although he wasn't rich, yet everybody thought a great deal of him. Even Dr. Bodkin (decidedly the most awful embodiment of authority whom Rhoda had ever yet known) treated Mr. Diamond with consideration. And Miss Minnie was his intimate friend. Rhoda had not the least idea of ever reciprocating Mr. Diamond's sentiments. But she could not help feeling that the existence of those sentiments increased her own importance in the world. And she had a lurking idea that it might, if known to Algy, increase her importance in his eyes also.

As to Mr. Diamond's part in the matter, Rhoda,

to say truth, concerned herself very little with that. Partly from a humble estimate of herself, and partly from that maiden incapacity for conceiving the fire and force of a masculine passion, which often makes girls pass for cruel who are only childish, she never had thought of Mr. Diamond as seriously suffering for her sake. But yet she was less cold and repellent to him than she had once been. It is difficult not to thaw somewhat in the presence of one whose words and looks make a genial atmosphere for that sensitive plant—youthful vanity.

Rhoda's wardrobe, which by this time had become considerable in quantity and tasteful in quality, was a great source of amusement to her. She delighted to trim, and stitch, and alter, and busy her fingers with the manufacture of bright-coloured bows of ribbon and dainty muslin frills. Mrs. Seth looked contemptuous at what she called "Rhoda's finery," and told her she would never do for a farmer's wife if she spent so much time over a parcel of frippery. Seth Maxfield shook his head gravely, and hoped that Rhoda was not given up utterly to worldliness and vanity; but feared that she had learnt no good at St. Chad's church, but had greatly backslided since the days of her attendance at chapel.

For the Seth Maxfields still belonged to the Wesleyan connexion, and disapproved of the

change that had taken place among the family at Whitford. Not that Seth was a deeply religious man. But his father's desertion of the Wesleyans appeared to him in the light of a party defection. It was "ratting;" and ratting, as Seth thought, without the excuse of a bribe.

"Look how well father has prospered!" he would say to his wife. "He's as warm a man, is father, as 'ere a one in Whitford. And the Church folks bought their tea and sugar of him all the same when he belonged to the Society. But I don't believe the Society will spend their money with him now as they did. So that's so much clean lost. I'm not so strict as some, myself; nor I don't see the use of it. But I do think a man ought to stick to what he's been brought up to. 'Specially when it's had the manifest blessing of Providence! If the Lord was so well satisfied with father being a Wesleyan, I think father might ha' been satisfied too."

Still there had been no quarrel between the Whitford Maxfields and those of Duckwell. They came together so seldom that opportunities for quarrelling were rare. And Seth had too great a respect for such manifestations of Providential approbation as had been vouchsafed to his father, to be willing to break entirely with the old man. So, when old Max proposed to send Rhoda to the farm for a few weeks, he paying a weekly stipend

for her board, his son and his son's wife had at once agreed to the proposition. And as they were not persons who brought their religious theories into the practical service of daily life, Rhoda's conscience was not disturbed by having a high and stern standard of duty held up for her attainment at every moment.

The Wesleyan preacher at that time in the district was a frequent guest at Duckwell Farm. And in the long summer evenings one or two neighbours would occasionally drop in to the cool stone-flagged parlour, where brother Jackson would read a chapter and offer up a prayer. And afterwards there would be smoking of pipes and drinking of home-brewed by the men; while Mrs. Seth and Rhoda would sit on a bench in the apple-orchard, near to the open window of the parlour, and sew, and talk, or listen to the conversation from within, as they pleased.

Rhoda perceived quickly enough that the Duckwell Farm species of Methodism was very different from the Methodism of David Powell. Mr. Jackson never said anything to frighten her. He talked, indeed, of sin, and of the dangers that beset sinners; but he never spoke as if they were real to him—as if he heard and saw all the terrible things he discoursed of so glibly. Then Mr. Jackson was, Rhoda thought, a somewhat greedy eater. He did not smoke, it was true; but he took a good share of Seth's strong ale, and was not above indulging in

gossip—perhaps to please himself, perhaps to please Mrs. Seth Maxfield.

Rhoda drew a comparison in her own mind between brother Jackson and the stately rector of St. Chad's, and felt much satisfaction at the contrast between them. How much nicer it was to be a member of a Church of England congregation; where one heard Dr. Bodkin or Mr. Warlock speak a not too long discourse in correct English, and with that refined accent which Rhoda's ear had learned to prize, and where the mellow old organ made a quivering atmosphere of music that seemed to mingle with the light from the painted windows; than to sit on a deal bench in a white-washed chapel, and painfully keep oneself broad awake whilst brother Jackson or brother Hinks bawled out a series of disjointed sentences, beginning with "Oh!" and displaying a plentiful lack of aspirates!

On the whole, perhaps, her stay at Duckwell Farm was a potent agent in confirming Rhoda in orthodox views of religion.

Generally, as she sat beside Mrs. Seth in the parlour, or on the bench outside the window, Rhoda withdrew her attention from the talk of brother Jackson and the others. She could think her own thoughts, and dream her own dreams, whilst she was knitting a stocking or hemming a pinafore for little Seth. But sometimes a name was mentioned at

these meetings that she could not hear with indifference. It was the name of David Powell.

The tone in which he was spoken of now was very opposite to the chorus of praise which had accompanied every mention of him among the Whitford Methodists, two years ago. There were rumours that he had defied the authority of Conference, and intended to secede from the Society. He was said to have been preaching strange doctrine in the remote parts of Wales, and to have caused and encouraged extravagant manifestations, such as were known to have prevailed at the preachings of Berridge and Hickes, seventy or eighty years ago; and earlier still, at the first open-air sermons of John Wesley himself, at Bristol. Brother Jackson shook his head, and pursed up his lips at the rumours. He had never much approved of Powell; and Seth Maxfield had distinctly disapproved of him. Seth had been brought up in the old sleepy days, when members of the Society in Whitford were comfortably undisturbed by the voice of an "awakening" preacher. He had resented the fuss that had been made about David Powell. He had been still more annoyed by his father's secession, which he attributed to Powell's over zeal and presumption. And he, by his own example, encouraged a hostile and critical tone in speaking of the preacher.

There was, indeed, but one voice raised in his

defence in the parlour at Duckwell Farm. This was the voice of Richard Gibbs, the head groom at Pudcombe Hall, who sometimes came over to Duckwell to join in the prayer-meetings there. Although Richard Gibbs was but a servant, he was a trusted and valued one; and he was received by the farmer and his wife with considerable civility. Richard "knew his place," as Mrs. Seth said, and was not "one of them as if you give 'em an inch they'll take an ell." And then he had a considerable knowledge of farriery, and had more than once given good advice to Farmer Maxfield respecting the treatment of sick horses and cattle. Seth was fond of repeating that he himself was "not so strict as some," finding, indeed, that a reputation for strictness, in a Methodistical sense, put him at a disadvantage with his fellow farmers on market-days. But whenever Richard Gibbs was spoken of, he would add to this general disclaimer of peculiar piety on his own part, "Not, mind you, but what there's some as conversion does a wonderful deal for, to this day, thanks be! Why, there's Dicky Gibbs, head-groom at Pudcombe Hall. Talk of blasphemers—well Dicky was a blasphemer! And now his lips are as pure from evil speaking as my little maid's there. And he's the only man I ever knew as had to do with horses that wouldn't tell you a lie. At first, I believe, there was some at the Hall—I name no names—didn't like Dicky's

plain truths. There was a carriage-horse to be sold, and Dicky spoke out and told this and that, and young master couldn't get his price. But in the long run it answers. Oh! I'm not against a fervent conversion, nor yet against conviction of sin—for some."

So Richard Gibbs sat many a summer evening in the flagged parlour at Duckwell Farm, and his melancholy, clean-shaven, lantern-jawed face was a familiar spectacle at prayer-meetings there.

"I have been much grieved and exercised in spirit on behalf of brother Powell," said Mr. Jackson, in his thick voice.

The expounding and the prayers were over. Seth had lighted his pipe; so had Roger Heath, the baker, from Pudcombe village. A great cool jug of ale stood on the table, and the setting sun sent his rays into the room, tempered by a screen of jessamine and vine leaves that hung down outside the window.

"Ah! And reason too!" said Seth gruffly. "He's been getting further and further out of the right furrow this many a day."

"They do say," observed sour-faced Roger Heath, "that there's dreadful scenes with them poor Welsh at his field-preachings. Men and women stricken down like bullocks, and screechings and convulsions, like as if they was all possessed with the devil."

"Lauk!" cried Mrs. Seth eagerly. "Why, how is that, then?"

Rhoda, listening outside, behind the screen of vine leaves at the open window, could not repress a shudder at the thought that, had David Powell shown this new power of his a year or two ago, she herself might have been among the convulsed who bore testimony to his terrible influence.

"How is that, Mrs. Maxfield?" returned Richard Gibbs. "Why, how can it be, except by abounding grace!"

"Nay, Mr. Gibbs, but how dreadful it seems, don't it? Just think of falling down in a fit in the open field!"

"Just think of living and dying unawakened to sin! Is not that a hundred thousand times more dreadful?"

"I hope it don't need to roll about like Bedlamites to be awakened to a sense of sin, Mr. Gibbs!" cried Seth Maxfield.

"The Lord forbid!" ejaculated brother Jackson.

"A likely tale!" added Mrs. Seth, cheerfully.

"I'm against all such doings," said Roger Heath, shaking his head.

"But if it be the Lord's doing, sir?" remonstrated Richard Gibbs, speaking slowly, and with an anxious lack-lustre gaze at the whitewashed ceiling, as though counsel might be read

there. "And I've heard tell that John Wesley did the same at his field-preachings."

Brother Jackson hastily wiped his mouth, after a deep draught of ale, before replying, "That was in the beginning, when such things may have been needful. But now, I fear, they only bring scandal upon us, and strengthen scoffers."

"I tell you what it is," said Seth, taking the pipe from his mouth, and waving it up and down to emphasise his words, "it's my opinion as David Powell's not quite—not quite right in his head."

"'Taint the first time that thought has crossed my mind," said the baker, who had once upon a time been uneasy under the yoke of Powell's stern views as to weights and measures.

"Of course," pursued Seth, argumentatively, "we've got to draw a line. "Religion is one thing and rampaging is another. From the first, when Powell began rampaging, I mistrusted what it would come to."

"The human brain is a very delicate and mysterious organ," said brother Jackson.

"Ah!" ejaculated Heath, with an air of profundity, as of one the extent of whose acquaintance with the human brain was not easily to be set forth in words, "you may well say so, sir. There you're right, indeed, brother Jackson."

"Why, there it is!" cried Seth. "And Powell, he overtaxed the human brain. It's like flying in

the face of Providence almost, to want to go so much beyond your neighbours. Why, he'd fast till he well-nigh starved himself."

"But he gave all he spared from his own stomach to the poor," put in Gibbs, looking sad and perplexed.

"I call all that rampaging," returned Seth, with a touch of his father's obstinacy.

"Dr. Evans read out an account of these doings in Wales from a newspaper in Mr. Barker the chemist's shop in Whitford last Saturday," said Heath. "I heard it. And Dr. Evans said it was catching, and that such-like excitement was dangerous, for you never know where it might end. And Dr. Evans is of a Welsh family himself," he added, bringing out this clause, as though it strikingly illustrated or elucidated the topic under discussion.

Mrs. Seth drew her little boy close to her, and covered his curly poll with her large maternal hand, as though to protect the little "human brain" within from all danger. "Mercy me!" she said, "I hope Powell won't come into these parts any more! I should be frightened to go to chapel, or to let the children go either."

"Oh, you need not be alarmed, Mrs. Maxfield," said brother Jackson, with a superior smile.

"Nay, but if it is catching, Mr. Jackson!" persisted the anxious mother.

"Tut, lass! It isn't like measles!" said her husband.

The ale being by this time exhausted and the pipes smoked out, brother Jackson rose to depart, and the baker went away with him. Seth Maxfield detained Gibbs for a few minutes to ask his advice about a favourite cart-horse.

"Well, Mr. Gibbs," said the housewife, when, the conference being over, he bade her "Good evening," "and when are your folks coming back to the Hall?"

"Not just yet, ma'am. Young master is gone to Westmoreland, I hear, to a wedding at some nobleman's house there. He'll be back at Pudcombe for the shooting."

"A wedding, eh?" said Mrs. Seth, with eager feminine interest in the topic. "Not his own wedding, I suppose?"

"Oh no, ma'am. 'Tis some friend of his, I believe, that he knew at Whitford; Erringham, I think the name is—a young gentleman that's going to marry the nobleman's niece. The housekeeper at the Hall was telling some of my fellow-servants about it the other day. But I'm ill at remembering the chat I hear. And 'tis unprofitable work too. Good evening, ma'am. Farewell, Seth," stooping down to pat the little one's curly head. "May the Lord bless and keep you!"

Mrs. Seth stood out in the apple-orchard, with

two of her children clinging to her skirts, and held up her hand to shade her eyes as she watched the departing figure of Richard Gibbs moving across the meadow, in the rosy evening light. Then she turned to the wooden bench where Rhoda was sitting, huddled together, with her work lying in her lap. "You didn't come in to prayers, Rhoda," said her sister-in-law. "But, however, you can hear it all just as well outside, as in. If it wasn't for civility to Mr. Jackson, I'd liefer stay out here these fine summer evenings, myself. And I was thinking—why, child, what a white face you've got! Like a sheet of white paper, for all the world! And your hands are quite cold, though it's been downright sultry! Mercy me, don't go and get sick on our hands, Rhoda! What will your father say? Come, you'd best get to bed, and I'll make you a hot posset myself."

Rhoda passively followed her sister-in-law to the fresh lavender-scented chamber which she occupied; and she consented to go to bed at once. Her head ached, she said, but she declined the hot posset, and only asked to be left quiet.

"There's always some bother with girls of that delicate sort," said Mrs. Seth to her husband, when she went downstairs again. "Rhoda's mother was just such another; looked as if you might blow her away. I can't think whatever made your father marry her! Not but Rhoda's a nice-tempered girl

enough, and very patient with the children. But, do you know, Seth, I'm afraid she's got a chill or something, sitting out in the orchard so late."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, she had a queer, scared kind of look on her face."

"Nonsense! Catching cold don't make people look scared."

"Something makes her look scared, I tell you. It's either she's sickening for some fever, or else she's seen a ghost!"

CHAPTER V.

(From Mrs. Errington to Mrs. Bodkin.)

"Long Fells, Westmoreland, July 26th, 18—.

"Dear Mrs. Bodkin,—Amid the tumult of feelings which have recently agitated me, I yet cannot neglect to write to my good friends in Whitford, and participate my emotions with those who have ever valued and appreciated my darling boy, at this most important moment of his life. It may perhaps surprise, but will, I am sure, gratify you to learn that Algernon is to be married on this day week to the Honourable Castalia Caroline Kilfinane, only daughter of the late Baron Kauldkail, of Kauldkail, who is, though not a relation, yet a connection of our own, being the niece of our dear cousin-in-law, Lord Seely. To say that all my proudest maternal aspirations are gratified by such a match is feebly to express what I feel. Birth (with me the first consideration, dear Mrs. Bodkin, for I make no

pretences with you, and confess that I should have deplored Algernon's mating below himself in that respect), elegance, accomplishments, and a devoted attachment to my son—these are Castalia's merits in my eyes. You will forgive me for having said nothing of this projected alliance until the last moment. The young people did not wish it to be talked about. They had a romantic fancy to have the wedding as quiet as possible, amid the rural beauties of this most lovely scenery, and thus escape the necessity for inviting the crowds of distinguished friends and connections on both sides of the house, who would have had to be present had the marriage taken place in London. That would have made it too pompous an affair to satisfy the taste of our Castalia, who is sensitive refinement itself. The dear Seelys are only too indulgent to the least wish of Algernon's, and they at once agreed to keep the secret. What poor Lord and Lady Seely will do when Algy leaves them I assure you I cannot imagine. It really grieves me to contemplate how they will miss him. But, of course, I cannot but rejoice selfishly to know that I shall have my dear children so near me. For (you may, perhaps, have heard the news) Lord Seely has, by his immense influence in the highest quarters, procured dear Algy an appointment. And, as good fortune will have it, the appointment brings him back to Whitford, among

his dear and early friends. He is to be appointed to the very arduous and responsible position of postmaster there. But, important as this situation is, it is yet only to be considered a stepping-stone to further advancement. Lord Seely wants Algy in town, which is indeed his proper sphere. And the result of some new ministerial combinations which are expected in certain quarters will, there is no doubt, put him in the very foremost rank of rising young diplomatists. But I must not say more even to you, dear Mrs. Bodkin, for these are State secrets, which should be sacredly respected.

"This is a most lovely spot, and the house combines the simple elegance of a cottage *ornée* with the luxurious refinement that befits the residence of a peer like Lord Seely. It is not, of course, fitted up with the same magnificence as his town mansion, or even as his ancestral place in Rutlandshire, but it is full of charms to the cultivated spirit, and our dear young people are revelling in its romantic quietude. There are very few guests in the house. By a kind thought of Algy's, which I am sure you will appreciate, Orlando Pawkins is to be best man at the wedding. The young man is naturally gratified by the distinction, and our noble relatives have received him with that affability which marks the truly high bred. There is also an Irish gentleman, the

Honourable John Patrick Price, who arrived last evening in order to be present at the ceremony. He is one of the most celebrated wits in town, and belongs to an Irish family of immense antiquity. Castalia will have none of her own intimate young friends for bridesmaids. To make a choice of one or two might have seemed invidious, and to have eight or ten bridesmaids would have made the wedding too ostentatious for her taste. Therefore she will be attended at the altar by the two daughters of the village clergyman—simple, modest girls, who adore her. The bride and bridegroom will leave us after the breakfast to pass their honeymoon at the Lakes. I shall return forthwith to Whitford, in order to make preparations for their reception. Lady Seely presses me to remain with her for a time after the wedding, but I am impatient to return to my dear Whitford friends, and share my happiness with them.

"Farewell, dear Mrs. Bodkin. Give my love to Minnie, who, I hope, has benefited by the sea-breezes; and best regards to the doctor. Believe me your very attached friend,

"Sophia Augusta Errington.

"P.S. Do you happen to know whether Barker, the chemist, has that cottage in the Bristol Road still to let? It might suit my dear children, at least for a while."

(From Miss Kilfinane to her cousin, Lady Louisa Marston.)

"Long Fells, 29th July.

"My dear Louisa,—I answer your last letter at once, for if I delay writing, I may not have time to do so at all. There are still a thousand things to be thought of, and my maid and I have to do it all, for you know what Aunt Seely is. She won't stir a finger to help anybody. Uncle Seely is very kind, but he has no say in the matter, nor, as far as that goes, in any matter in his own house.

"You ask about the wedding. It will be very scrubby, thanks to my lady's stinginess. She would have it take place in this out-of-the-way country house, which they scarcely ever come to, in order to save the expense of a handsome breakfast. There will be nobody invited but the parson and the apothecary, I suppose. I hate Long Fells. It is the most inconvenient house in the world, I do believe; and so out of repair that my maid declares the rain comes through the roof on to her bed.

"Ancram's mother arrived last week. She was half inclined to be huffy at first, when we told her our news, because she had been kept in the dark till the last moment. But she has got over her sulks now, and makes the best of it. I can see now that Ancram was right in keeping

our engagement secret from her as long as possible. She would have been a dreadful worry, and told everybody. She is wonderfully like Lady Seely in the face, only much better looking, and has a fine natural colour that makes my lady's cheeks look as if they had been done by a house painter.

"Ancram has invited an old Whitford acquaintance of his to be his best man at the wedding. He says that as we are going to live there for a time at least, it would never do to offend all the people of the place by taking no notice of them. It would be like going into a hornet's nest. And the young man in question has been civil to Ancram in his school-boy days. He is a certain Mr. Pawkins, who lives at a place with the delightful name of Pudcombe Hall. He is not so bad as I expected, and is quiet and good-natured. If all the Whitfordians turn out as well as he, I shall be agreeably surprised. But I fear they are a strange set of provincial bumpkins. However, we shall not have to remain amongst them long, for Uncle Val. has privately promised to move heaven and earth to get Ancram a better position. You know he is to be postmaster at Whitford. Only think of it! It would be absurd, if it were not such a downright shame. And I more than suspect my lady of having hurried Uncle Val. into accepting it for Ancram. I suppose she thinks anything is good enough for us.

"I wish you could see Ancram! He is very handsome, and even more elegant than handsome. And his manners are admitted on all hands to be charming. It is monstrous to think of burying his talents in a poky little hole like Whitford. But there is this to be said; if he hadn't got this postmastership we could not have been married at all. For he is poor. And you know what my great fortune is! I do think it is too bad that people of our condition should ever be allowed to be so horribly poor. The Government ought to do something for us.

"Uncle Val. has made me a handsome present of money to help to furnish our house. I'm sure this is quite unknown to my lady. So don't say anything about it among your people at home, or it may come round to Lady S.'s ears, and poor Uncle Val. would get scolded. Give my love to Aunt Julia and my cousins. I hope to see you all next season in town, for Ancram and I have quite made up our minds not to stick in that nasty little provincial hole all the year round. Mrs. Errington is to go back there directly after the wedding, to see about a house for us, and get things ready. Of course, if there's anything that I don't like, I can alter it myself when I arrive.

"Good-bye, dear Louisa. Don't forget your affectionate cousin, who signs herself (perhaps for the last time),

"C. C. KILFINANE."

(From Orlando Pawkins to his sister, Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs.)

"Long Fells, Westmoreland. Monday evening.

"My dear Jemima,—I am sorry that you and Humphrey should have felt hurt and thought I was making mysteries. But I assure you I was quite taken by surprise when I got Errington's letter, telling me about his wedding, and inclosing Lord Seely's invitation to me to come here. I knew nothing about it before, I give you my word.

"You ask me to write you full details of the affair, and I am sure I would if I could. But I don't know any more than the rest of the world. I don't think much of Long Fells. The land is poor, and the house almost tumbling to pieces. Lord Seely is uncommonly polite, but I don't much like my lady. And she has a beast of a lap-dog that snaps at everybody. Errington is the same as ever, only he looks so much older in these two years. Any one would take him to be five or six and twenty, at least. As to the bride, she don't take much notice of me, so I haven't got very well acquainted with her. I ride about the country nearly all day long. Lord Seely has provided me with a pretty decent mount. I shall be glad when the wedding is over, and I can get away, for it's precious dull here. Even your friend Jack Price seems moped and out of sorts, and goes about singing, 'The heart that

once truly loves never forgets,' or something like that, enough to give a fellow the blue devils.

"I asked about what you wanted to know about the wedding dresses, but I couldn't make out much from the answers I got. Miss Kilfinane is to wear a white silk gown, trimmed with something or other that has a French name. Perhaps you can guess what it is. The bridesmaids are fat, freckled girls, the daughters of the parson. I think I have now given you all the particulars I can.

"I wish you and Humphrey would come down to Pudcombe in September. Tell him I can give him some fairish shooting, and will do all I can to make you both comfortable. Believe me,

"Your affectionate brother, O. P."

CHAPTER VI.

It was the evening before the wedding. In a low long room that was dark with black oak panelling, and gloomy, moreover, by reason of the smallness of the ivy-framed casement at one end, which alone admitted the daylight into it, Lord Seely sat before the hearth.

Although it was August there was a fire. There were few evenings of the year when a fire was not agreeable at Long Fells; and one was certainly agreeable on this especial evening. The day had been rainy. The whole house seemed dark and damp. A few logs that had been laid on the top of the coal fire sputtered and smoked drearily. My lord sat in a large high-backed chair, which nearly hid his diminutive figure from view, except on the side of the fireplace. His head was sunk on his breast; his hands were plunged deep into his pockets; his legs were stretched out towards the hearth; his whole atti-

tude was undignified. It was such an attitude as few of his friends or acquaintances had ever seen him in, for it was nearly impossible for Lord Seely to be unconscious or careless of the effect he was producing in the presence of an observer.

He was now absorbed in thought, and was allowing his outer man to express the nature of his musings. They were not pleasant musings, as any spectator would at once have pronounced who should have seen his posture, and his pursed mouth, and his eyebrows knitted anxiously under the bald yellow forehead. The entrance even of a footman into the room would have produced an instant change in Lord Seely's demeanour. But no footman was there to see his lordship sunk in a brown study.

At length he raised his head and glanced out of the window. It had ceased to rain, but the drops were still trickling down the window-panes from the points of the ivy leaves; and it was already so dark that the firelight began to throw fantastic shadows from the quaint old furniture, and to shine with a dull red glow on the polished oak panels. Lord Seely rang the bell.

"Has Mr. Errington returned?" he asked of the servant who appeared in answer to the summons.

"Not yet, my lord."

"Tell them to beg Mr. Errington, with my

compliments, to do me the favour to step here before he dresses for dinner."

"Yes, my lord."

"Don't light that lamp! or, stay; yes, you may light it. Put the shade over it, and place it behind me. Draw the curtains across the window. Take care that my message is given to Mr. Errington directly he comes home."

The servant withdrew. And Lord Seely, when he was left alone, began to walk up and down the room with his hands behind him. Thus Algernon found him when, in about ten minutes, he appeared, rosy and fresh from his ride.

"I must apologise for my muddy condition," he cried gaily. "Pawkins and I rode over to Applethwaite to get something for Castalia that was found wanting at the last moment. And I am splashed to the eyebrows. But I thought it best to come just as I was, as your lordship's message was pressing."

"Thank you. I am much obliged to you, Ancram. It is not, in truth, that there is any such immediate hurry for what I have to say, that it might not have waited an hour or so; but I thought it likely that we might not have so good an opportunity of speaking alone together."

Lord Seely seated himself once more in the high-backed chair, but in a very different attitude from his former one. He was upright, majestic, with

one hand in his breast, and the other reclining on the arm of his chair. But on his face might be read, by one who knew it well, traces of trouble and of being ill at ease. Algernon read my lord's countenance well enough. He stood leaning easily on the mantel-shelf, tapping his splashed boot with his riding-whip, and looking down on Lord Seely with an air of quiet expectation.

"I have been having a serious conversation with Castalia," said my lord, after a preliminary clearing of his throat.

Algernon said, smilingly, "I hope you have not found it necessary to scold her, my lord? The phrase, 'Having a serious conversation' with any one, always suggests to my mind the administering of a reprimand."

"No, Ancram. No; I have not found it necessary to scold Castalia. I am very much attached to her, and very anxious for her happiness. She is the child of my favourite sister."

The old man's voice was not so firm as usual when he said this; and he looked up at Algernon with an appealing look.

Algernon could be pleasant, genial, even affectionate in his manner—but never tender. That was more than he could compass by any movement of imitative sympathy. He had never even been able so to simulate tenderness as to succeed in singing a pathetic song. Perhaps he had learned that it was

useless to make the attempt. At all events, he did not now attempt to exhibit any answering tenderness to Lord Seely's look and tone of unwonted feeling, in speaking of his dead sister's child. His reply was hard, clear, and cheerful, as the chirp of a canary bird.

"I know you have always been extremely good to Castalia, my lord. We are both of us very sensible of your kindness, and very much obliged by it."

"No, no," said my lord, waving his hand. "No, no, no. Castalia owes me nothing. She has been to me almost as my own daughter. There can be no talk of obligations between her and me."

Then he paused, for what appeared to be a long time. In the silence of the room the damp logs hissed like whispering voices.

"Ancram," Lord Seely said at length, "Castalia is very much attached to you."

"I assure you, my lord, I am very grateful to her."

"Ahem! Castalia's is not an expansive nature. She was, perhaps, too much repressed and chilled in childhood, by living with uncongenial persons. But she is responsive to kindness, and it develops her best qualities. I will frankly own, that I am very anxious about her future. You will not owe me a grudge for saying that much, Ancram?"

"I never owe grudges, my lord. But I trust you have no doubt of my behaving with kindness to Castalia?"

"No, Ancram. No; I hope not. I believe not."

"I am glad of that; because—the doubt would come rather too late to be of much use, would it not?"

Algernon spoke with his old bright smile; but two things were observable throughout this interview. Firstly, that Algernon, though still perfectly respectful, no longer addressed his senior with the winning, cordial deference of manner which had so captivated Lord Seely in the beginning of their acquaintance. Secondly, that Lord Seely appeared conscious of some reason in the young man's mind for dissatisfaction, and to be desirous of deprecating that dissatisfaction.

At the same time, there seemed to be in Lord Seely an undercurrent of feeling struggling for expression. He had the air of a man who, knowing himself to have right and reason on his side in the main, yet is aware of a tender point in his case which an unscrupulous adversary will not hesitate to touch, and which he nervously shrinks from having touched. He winced at Algernon's last words, and answered rather hotly, "It would be too late. Your insinuation is a just one. If I had any misgivings I ought to have expressed them, and acted

on them before. But the fact is that this—the final arrangement of this marriage—took me in a great measure by surprise."

"So it did me, my lord!"

Lord Seely had been gazing moodily at the fire. He now suddenly raised his eyes and looked searchingly at Algernon. The young man's face wore an expression of candid amusement. His arched eyebrows were lifted, and he was smiling as unconcernedly as if the subject in hand touched himself no jot.

"I give you my word," he continued lightly, "that when Lady Seely first spoke to me about it, I was—oh, 'astonished' is no word to express what I felt!"

A dark red flush came into Lord Seely's withered cheeks, and mounted to his forehead. He dropped his eyes, and moved uneasily on his chair, passing one hand through the tuft of grey hair that stood up above his ear. Algernon went on, with an almost boyish frankness of manner:

"Of course, you know, I should hardly have ventured to aspire to such an idea quite unassisted. And I believe I said something or other to my lady—very stumblingly, I have no doubt, for I remember feeling very much bewildered. I said some word about my being a poor devil with nothing in the world to offer to a lady in Miss Kilfinane's position—except, of course, my undying devotion.

Only one cannot live altogether on that. But Lady Seely was very sanguine, and saw no difficulties. She said it could be managed. And she was right, you see. Where there's a will, there's a way. And I am really to be married to Castalia to-morrow. It seems too good to be true!"

Lord Seely rose and faced the young man; and as he did so, his lordship looked really dignified; for the sincere feeling within him had for once obliterated his habitual uneasy self-consciousness.

"Ancram," he said, "I am afraid, from what Castalia tells me, that you are greatly dissatisfied with the position I have been able to procure for you."

"Oh, my lord, Castalia ought not to have said so! If she can content herself in it for a time, how can I venture to complain?"

"I am sorry to find," continued Lord Seely, "that your circumstances are more seriously embarrassed than I thought."

"Are they, my lord? I profess I don't know how to disembarrass them!"

"You are in debt——"

"I had the honour of avowing as much to your lordship when my marriage was first discussed; as you, doubtless, remember?"

"Yes; and you named a sum which I——"

"Which your lordship was kind enough to pay. Certainly."

"But it now appears that that sum did not cover the whole of your liabilities, Ancram. Castalia tells me that you have been annoyed by applications for money quite recently."

Algernon smiled, and put his head on one side, as if trying to recall a half-forgotten fact. "Well," said he at length, "upon my word I have forgotten the exact sum which I did name to your lordship, but I have no doubt it was correct at the time. The worst of it is, that my debts have this unfortunate peculiarity—they won't stay paid!"

"It is a great pity, Ancram, for a young man to get into the habit of thinking lightly of debt. It is, in fact," continued his lordship, growing graver and graver as he spoke, "a fatal habit of mind."

"My dear lord, I don't think lightly of it by any means! But, really—is it not best to accept the inevitable with some cheerfulness?"

"'The inevitable,' Ancram?"

"Yes, my lord; in my position, debt was inevitable. I could not be a member of your family circle, a frequent inmate of your house, doing the things you did, going where you went, without incurring some expense."

It was no want of tact which made Algernon speak thus plainly and coarsely. He did not fail (as his mother might have done) to perceive that his words pained and mortified his hearer. He would by no means have aimed such a shaft at Lady Seely,

knowing that nature had protected her feelings with a hide of some toughness; and knowing, moreover, that my lady would unhesitatingly have flung back some verbal missile, at least equally rough and heavy. But my lord was at once more vulnerable and more scrupulous. And although Algernon was the last person in the world to be guilty of gratuitous cruelty, yet, if one is to fight, one had best use the most effective weapons, and take advantage of any chink in the enemy's armour to drive one's javelin home!

"I regret," said Lord Seely, with a little catching of the breath, like a man who has received a cold douche, "I deplore that your intimacy with my family should have led you into a false position."

"Not at all, my lord! My position in your family has been a very pleasant one."

"I ought, perhaps—it was my duty—to have inquired more particularly into your means, and to have ascertained whether they sufficed for the life you were leading in London. You were very young, and without experience. I—I reproach myself, Ancram."

"Don't do that, my lord! There is really no need. I'm sure nobody is the worse for the few pounds I owe at this moment: not even my tailor, who has cheated me handsomely, doing me the honour to treat me as one of your lordship's own class!"

Lord Seely bent down his grey head and meditated with a pained and anxious face. Then he looked up, and said :

"You know, Ancram, that I am not a rich man for one in my station."

Algernon bowed gracefully.

"Had I been so, I should have made a settlement upon Castalia; but, although I have no daughters of my own to provide for," (with a little sigh) "yet my property is very strictly tied up. There are claims on it, too, of various sorts——" ("Lady Seely screws all she can out of him for that nephew of hers," was Algy's mental comment.) "And, in brief, I am not in a position to command any large sums of ready money. I believe I said as much to you before ?"

Algernon bowed again and smiled.

"Well, I repeat it now, in order to impress on you the fact, that neither you nor Castalia must look to me for pecuniary help in the future."

"Oh, my lord——"

"I do not say that Castalia might not have a right to ask such help of me ; but I merely assure you that it will be out of my power to grant it. You, perhaps, scarcely realise how poor a man may be who has a fairly large rent-roll ?"

"I think I have begun to realise it, my lord."

Lord Seely looked quickly into the young man's face, but it was smiling and inscrutable.

"Well," he resumed, "I will only add, that for this once, and presuming your present debts are not heavy——"

"Oh dear no! A trifle."

"I will discharge them if you will let me have the amount accurately. I have a great repugnance to the thought of Castalia—and you—beginning your married life in debt."

"A thousand thanks. It will be better for us to start fair."

"I hope, Ancram, that you will use every endeavour to live clearly within your means, and to make the best of your circumstances. The fact is, this marriage has been hurried on——"

Algernon did not answer in words; but he gave an expressive shrug and smile, which said, as plainly as possible, "I have not hurried it on!"

Lord Seely coloured deeply, and seemed to shrink bodily, as if he had received a blow. He went on hastily, and with less than his usual self-possession: "I—I have felt, rather than perceived, a—a little touch of bitterness in your manner lately. There, there, we will not quibble about the word! If not bitter, you have not been, at all events, in the frame of mind I wished and hoped to find you in. You are young; and youth is apt to be a little unreasonable in its expectations. I own—I admit—that your worldly position will not be—a—

exactly brilliant. But I assure you that in these days there are many gentlemen of good abilities, and industry, who would be glad of it."

"Oh, I am fully aware of my good fortune, my lord! Besides, you know, this is only a stepping-stone."

"Yes; we—we hope so. But, Ancram—and this is what I had in my mind to say to you frankly—don't neglect or despise the present employment, in looking forward to something better."

"By no means!"

"For your own sake—your own sake, I earnestly advise you not to give way to a feeling of discontent."

"Do I look discontented? Upon my word, your lordship is doing me singular injustice!"

"There is a smiling discontent, as well as a frowning discontent: and I don't know but that it is the worst of the two."

Algernon laughed outright.

"Well," said he, "you must own that it is a little difficult to give satisfaction!"

His light smooth tone jarred disagreeably on Lord Seely. If the latter had thought to make any impression on the young man, to draw from him any outburst of feeling, he had signally failed. Algernon's words could not be objected to, but the tone in which they were uttered was completely

nonchalant. His nonchalance increased in proportion to Lord Seely's earnestness. A year ago Algernon would have brought his manner into harmony with my lord's mood. He would have been grave, attentive, eager to show his appreciation of my lord's kindness, and his value for my lord's advice. But now there was some malice in his smiling good-humour; a little cruelty in the brightness of his unruffled serenity. He was genuinely tickled at seeing the pompous little nobleman embarrassed in speaking to him, Algernon Errington, and he enjoyed what comedy there might be in the situation none the less because his patron suffered.

In truth, Algernon was discontented. His was not a gnawing, black sort of discontent. He neither grew lean, nor yellow, nor morose; but his irony was sometimes flavoured with acidity; and instead of being easily tolerant of such follies as zeal, enthusiasm, or fervent reverence, he was now apt to speak of them with a disdainful superiority. And he had, too, an air of having washed his hands of any concern with his own career; of laying the responsibility on Destiny, or whomsoever it might concern; of awaiting, with sarcastic patience, the next turn of the wheel—as if life were neither a battle nor a march, but a gigantic game of rouge-et-noir, with terrible odds in favour of the bank.

Lord Seely was no match for this youth of two-and-twenty. Lord Seely had intended to impress him deeply; to read him a lecture, in which Olympian severity should be tempered by mercy; to convince him, by dignified and condescending methods, of his great good fortune in having secured the hand of Castalia Kilfinane of Kauldkail; and of his great unreasonableness (not to say presumption) in not accepting that boon on bended knee, instead of grumbling at being made postmaster of Whitford. But in order to make an impression, it does not suffice to have tools only; the surface to be impressed must also exist, and be adapted to the operation. How impress the bright, cool, shining liquid bosom of a lake, for instance? Oar and keel, pebble and arrow, wind and current, are alike powerless to make a furrow that shall last.

Lord Seely laboured under the disadvantage, in this crisis, of feeling for other persons with some keenness; a circumstance which frittered away his power considerably, and made him vacillating. Algernon's capacities for feeling were, on this occasion, steadily concentrated on himself, and this gave his behaviour a solid consistency, which was felt even beneath the surface-lightness of his manner.

"I hope," said Lord Seely, rather sadly than

solemnly—"I do most earnestly hope, Ancram, that you will be happy in this marriage!"

"Your lordship is very good. I assure you, I feel your goodness."

He said it as if he had been accepting an invitation to dinner.

"And—and that you will do your best to make Castalia happy?"

"You may rely on my doing my best."

"There are discrepancies, perhaps—disparities—but those marriages are not always the happiest in which the external circumstances on both sides seem to be best matched. You are young. You are untrammelled. You have no irrevocable past behind you to regret. I do not see—no, I do not see why, with mutual regard and respect, you should not make a good life of it."

"These are the most lugubrious nuptial felicitations that ever were offered to a bridegroom, I should fancy!" thought Algernon. And he had some difficulty in keeping his countenance, so vividly did he feel the ludicrous aspect of his lordship's well-meant effort at "impressing" him.

"I should feel some sense of responsibility if—if things were not to turn out as brightly as we hope—and believe—and believe they will turn out."

"Oh, don't distress yourself about that, my lord!" cried Algernon. (He had very nearly said "don't apologise!") "There is the dressing-bell," he added, with alacrity, taking his hat up from the table. "If your lordship has no further commands, I think I——"

"Yes; go, Ancram. I will not detain you longer. Remember," said Lord Seely, taking the young man's hand between both his own, and speaking in a tremulous voice, "remember, Ancram, that I wish to serve you. My intention all along has been to do my best for you. You have been a very pleasant inmate in my home. Ancram, be good to Castalia. For good or for evil, you are her fate now. No one can come between you. Be good to her."

"My dear lord, I beg you to believe that I will make Castalia's happiness the study of my life. And—oh, I have no doubt we shall get on capitally. With your interest, it can't be long before we get into a better berth. I know you'll do your best for us, for Castalia's sake; oh, and mine, too, I am happy to believe. Yes, certainly. I really am in such a state of mud that I believe my very hair is splashed. It will take me all the time there remains for dressing to get myself presentably clean, positively. *Au revoir*, my lord. And thank you very, very much."

With his jauntiest step, and brightest smile, Algernon left the room.

Lord Seely returned to his chair before the hearth, resumed his moody, musing attitude, and sat there, alone, with his head sunk on his breast until they called him to dinner.

CHAPTER VII.

In the first week of August Mrs. Errington returned to Whitford. She had got over her annoyance at not having been intrusted sooner with the news of Algernon's engagement to Miss Kilfinane. By dint of telling her friends so, she had at last persuaded herself that she had been in the secret all along; and, if she felt any other mortifications and disappointments connected with her son's marriage, she kept them to herself. But it is probable that she did not keenly feel any such. She was not sensitive; and she did believe that, by connecting himself so nearly with Lord Seely's family, Algernon was advancing his prospects of success in the world. These sources of comfort, combined with an excellent digestion, and the perennial gratification of contemplating her own claims to distinction as contrasted with those of her neighbours, kept the worthy lady in good spirits, and she returned to Whitford

in a kind of full blow of cheerfulness and importance.

Her reception there, at the outset, was, however, far from being what she had looked forward to. She had written to Rhoda announcing the day and hour of her arrival, and requesting that James Maxfield should meet her at the "Blue Bell" inn, where the coach stopped, with a fly for the conveyance of herself and her luggage to her old quarters. Mrs. Errington had not previously written to Rhoda from Westmoreland, but she had forwarded to her at different times two copies of the *Applethwaite Advertiser*. In one of these journals a preliminary announcement of Algernon's marriage had appeared under the heading of "Alliance in High Life." In the second there was an account of the wedding, and the breakfast, and the rejoicings in the village of Long Fells, which did much credit to the imaginative powers of the writer. According to the *Applethwaite Advertiser*, the ceremony had been imposing, the breakfast sumptuous, and the village demonstrations enthusiastic.

Mrs. Errington had bought twenty copies of the newspaper for distribution among her friends; and she pleased herself with thinking how grateful the Maxfields would be to her for sending them the papers with the interesting paragraphs marked in red ink. She also looked forward with much

complacency to having Rhoda for a listener to all her narrations about the wedding and life at Long Fells, and the great people whom she had met there. Rhoda was such a capital listener! And then, besides and beyond all that, Mrs. Errington was fond of Rhoda, and had more motherly warmth of feeling for her than she had as yet attained to for her new daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Errington's head was stretched out of the coach-window as the vehicle clattered up the archway of the "Blue Bell" inn. It was about seven o'clock on a fine August evening, and there was ample light enough for the traveller to distinguish all the familiar features of the streets through which she passed. "James will be standing in the inn-yard ready to receive me," she thought; "and I suppose the fly will be waiting at the corner by the booking-office. I wonder whether the driver will be the lame old man or young Simmons?" She was still debating this question when the coach turned sharply round under the archway, and stopped in the great rambling yard of the old-fashioned "Blue Bell" inn.

Mrs. Errington got down unassisted; James Maxfield was not there. She looked round in bewilderment, standing hot, dusty, and tired in the yard, where, after a bustling waiter had tripped up to her to ask if she wanted a room, and tripped away again, no one took any heed of her.

A fly was not to be had in Whitford at a moment's notice. After waiting for some ten minutes, Mrs. Errington found there was nothing for it but to walk to her lodgings. She left her luggage in the coach-office to be called for, and set out carrying a rather heavy hand-bag, and hurrying through the streets at a pace much quicker than her usual dignified rate of moving. She wished not to be seen and recognised by any passing acquaintance under circumstances so unfavourable to an impressive or triumphant demeanour.

Arrived at Jonathan Maxfield's house, the aspect of things was not much improved. Betty Grimshaw opened the door, and stared in surprise on seeing Mrs. Errington. She had not been expected. Mr. Maxfield was over at Duckwell at his son's farm. James was busy in the storehouse. And as for Rhoda, she was away on a visit to Miss Bodkin at the seaside, and had been for some weeks. A letter? Oh, if a letter had come for Rhoda, her father would have sent it on to her. It was a two days' post from where she was to Whitford. And the newspapers? Betty did not know. She had not seen them. Her brother-in-law had had them, she supposed. Yes; she had heard that Mr. Algernon was married, or going to be married. The servants from Pudcombe Hall had spoken of it when they came

into the shop. Jonathan had not said anything on the subject as far as she knew. Mrs. Errington knew what Jonathan was. He never was given to much conversation. And it was Betty's opinion, delivered very frankly, that Jonathan grew crustier and closer as he got older. But wouldn't Mrs. Errington like a cup of tea? Betty would have the kettle boiling in a few minutes.

Mrs. Errington felt rather forlorn, as she entered her old sitting-room and looked around her. It was trim and neat, indeed, and spotlessly clean; but it had the chill, repellent look of an uninhabited apartment. The corner cupboard was locked, and its treasure of old china hidden from view. Algernon's books were gone from the shelf above the piano. A white cloth was spread over the sofa, and the hearth-rug was turned upside down, displaying a grey lining, instead of the gay-coloured scraps of cloth.

She missed Rhoda. She had become accustomed to Algernon's absence from the familiar room; but Rhoda's absence made a blank in it, that was depressing. And perhaps Mrs. Errington herself was surprised to find how dreary the place looked, without the girl's gentle face and modest figure. She gladly accepted Betty Grimshaw's invitation to take her tea downstairs in the comfortable, bright kitchen, instead of alone in the melancholy gentility of her own sitting-room.

Betty was as wooden-faced, and grim, and rigid in her aspect as ever. But she was not unfriendly towards her old lodger. And, moreover, she was entirely respectful in her manner, holding it as a fixed article of her faith that "gentlefolks born" were intended by Providence to be treated with deference, and desiring to show that she herself had been trained to becoming behaviour under the roof of a person of quality.

It was little more than nine o'clock when Mrs. Errington rose to go to bed, being tired with her journey. As she did so, she said, "Mrs. Grimshaw, will you get James to send a hand-cart for my luggage in good time to-morrow?"

"Oh, your luggage?" returned Betty. "Well, do you think it is worth while to send for it, if you're not going to stay?"

Mrs. Errington was so much astonished by this speech, that she sat down again on the chair she had just quitted. Then, after a minute's pause, her mind, which did not move very rapidly, arrived at what she supposed to be the explanation of Betty's words. "Oh, I see," she said; "you took it for granted that, on my son's marriage, I should leave you and join him. But it is not so, my good soul. My daughter-in-law has implored me to live with them, but I have refused. It is better for the young people to be by themselves; and I prefer my own independence also. No, my good

Mrs. Grimshaw, I shall remain in my old quarters until Mr. Algernon leaves Whitford for good. And perhaps, even then, I may not give you up altogether, who knows?"

Betty hesitated for an instant before replying. "Then Jonathan has not said anything to you about giving up the rooms?"

"Good gracious, no! I have not heard from Mr. Maxfield at all!"

"I suppose he didn't expect you back quite so soon. And—there, I'm sure I won't take upon myself to speak for him. I shouldn't have got on with my brother-in-law all these years if I hadn't made it a rule to try for peace and quietness, and never interfere."

But Mrs. Errington persisting in her demand that Betty should explain herself more fully, the latter at length confessed that, during the past two or three weeks, Jonathan Maxfield had declared his intention of getting rid of his lodger, and of not letting the first floor of his house again. "Your sitting-room is to be kept as a kind of a drawing-room for Rhoda, as I understand Jonathan," said she.

A drawing-room for Rhoda! Mrs. Errington could not believe her senses. "Why, what is Mr. Maxfield thinking of?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, you don't know what a fuss Jonathan has been making lately about Rhoda! Before

you went away, you know, ma'am, as he had begun to spend a deal of money on her clothes. And since then, more and more; it's been all his talk as Rhoda was to be a lady. The notion has got stuck fast in his head, and wild horses wouldn't drag it out."

Mrs. Errington rose very majestically. "I much fear," she said, "I much fear that I am responsible for this delusion of your brother-in-law. I have a little spoiled the girl, and taken too much notice of her. I regret it now. But, really, Rhoda is such a sweet creature that I don't know that I have been so very much to blame, either. It is true I have introduced her to my friends, and brought her forward a little beyond her station; but I little thought a man of Mr. Maxfield's common sense would have been so utterly led away by kindly-meant patronage."

"Well, I don't know as it's so much that, ma'am," returned Betty, in a matter-of-fact tone, "as it is that Jonathan has latterly been thinking a deal about his money. And he knows money will do great things——"

"Money can never confer gentle birth, my good creature!"

"No, for sure, ma'am. That's what I say myself. I know my catechism, and I was brought up to respect my superiors. But, you see, Jonathan's heart is greatly set on his riches. He's a well-off

man, is my brother-in-law; more so than many folks think. He's been a close man all his life. And, for that matter, he's close enough now in some things, and screws me down in the housekeeping pretty tight. But for Rhoda he seems to grudge nothing, and wants her to make a show and a splash almost—if you can fancy such a thing of Jonathan! But there's no saying how men will turn out; not even the old ones. I'm sure I often and often thank my stars I've kept single—no offence to you, ma'am."

Mrs. Errington went to bed in a bewildered frame of mind. Tired as she was, the news she had heard kept her awake for some time. Leave her lodgings! Leave old Max's house, which had been her home for so many years! It was incredible. And, indeed, before long she had made up her mind to resist old Max's intention of turning her out. "I shall give him a good talking to, to-morrow," she said to herself. "Stupid old man! He really must not be allowed to make himself so absurd." And then Mrs. Errington fell asleep.

But the next day old Max did not return to be talked to; nor the day after that. James Maxfield went over to Duckwell, and came back bringing a formal notice to Mrs. Errington to quit the lodgings, signed by his father.

"What does this mean, James?" asked Mrs. Errington, with much emphasis, and wide-open

eyes. James did not know what it meant. He did not apparently much care, either. He had never been on very friendly terms with the Erringtons (having, indeed, come but seldom in contact with them during all the time they had lived under the same roof with him), and had, perhaps, been a little jealous in his sullen, silent way, of their petting of Rhoda. At all events, on the present occasion, he was not communicative nor very civil. He had performed his father's behests, and he knew nothing more. His father was not coming back home just yet. And James volunteered the opinion that he didn't mean to come back until Mrs. Errington should be gone.

All this was strange and disagreeable. But Mrs. Errington was not of an irritable or anxious temperament. And her self-complacency was of too solid a kind to be much affected even by ruder rubs than any which could be given by James Maxfield's uncouth bluntness. "I shall take no notice whatever of this," she said, with serene dignity. "When your father comes back, I shall talk to him. Meanwhile, I have a great many important things to do."

The good lady did in truth begin at once to busy herself in seeking a house for Algernon, and getting it furnished. There was but a month to make all arrangements in, and all Mrs. Errington's friends who could by any possibility be pressed into the

service were required to assist her. The Docketts; Rose and Violet McDougall; Mrs. Smith, the surgeon's wife; and even Miss Chubb, were sent hither and thither, asked to write notes, to make inquiries, to have interviews with landlords, and to take as much trouble, and make as much fuss as possible, in the task of getting ready an abode for Mr. and the Honourable Mrs. Algernon Errington.

A house was found without much difficulty. It was a small isolated cottage on the outskirts of the town, with a garden behind it which ran down to the meadows bordering the Whit; and was the very house, belonging to Barker the chemist, of which Mrs. Errington had written to her friend Mrs. Bodkin.

It was really a very humble dwelling. But the rent of it was quite as large as Algernon would be able to afford. Mrs. Errington said, "I prefer a small place for them. If they took a more pretentious house, they would be expected to entertain. And you know, my dear sir," (or "madam," as the case might be) "that there is a great mixture in Whitford society; and that would not suit my daughter-in-law, of course. You perceive that, don't you?" And then the person so addressed might flatter him or herself with the idea of belonging to the unmixed portion of society.

Indeed, this terrible accusation of being "mixed" was one which Mrs. Errington was rather

fond of bringing against the social gatherings in Whitford. And she had once been greatly offended, and a good deal puzzled, by Mr. Diamond's asking her what objection there could be to that; and challenging her to point out any good thing on earth, from a bowl of punch upwards, which was not "mixed!" But however this might be, no one believed at all that the mixture in Whitford society was the real reason for young Errington's inhabiting so small a house. They knew perfectly well that if Algernon's means had been larger, his house would have been larger also.

And yet, Mrs. Errington's flourish was not without its effect on some persons. They in their turn repeated her lamentations on the "mixture" to such of their acquaintances as did not happen to be also her acquaintances. And as there were very few individuals in Whitford either so eccentric, or so courageous, as Mr. Diamond, this mysterious mixture was generally acknowledged, with shrugs and head-shakings, to be a very great evil indeed.

At the end of about a fortnight, old Max one day reappeared in his own house, and marched upstairs to Mrs. Errington's sitting-room.

"Well, ma'am," said he, without any preliminary greeting whatsoever, "I suppose you understood the written notice to quit, that I sent you? But as my son James informs me that you don't seem to be taking any steps in consequence of it, I've come

to say that you will have to remove out of my abode on the twenty-seventh of this month, and not a day later. So you can act according to your judgment in finding another place to dwell in."

Mrs. Errington was inspecting the contents of a packing-case which had been sent from London by Lady Seely. It contained, as her ladyship said, "some odds and ends that would be useful to the young couple." The only article of any value in the whole collection was a porcelain vase, which had long stood in obscurity on a side-table in Lord Seely's study, and would not be missed thence. Lady Seely, at all events, would not miss it, as she seldom entered the room; and therefore she had generously added it to the odds and ends!"

Mrs. Errington looked up, a little flushed with the exertion of stooping over the packing-case, and confronted Mr. Maxfield. Her round, red full-moon face contrasted in a lively manner with the old man's grey, lank, harsh visage. The years, as they passed, did not improve old Max's appearance. And as soon as she beheld him, Mrs. Errington was convinced of the justice of Betty Grimshaw's remark, that her brother-in-law seemed to have grown closer and crustier than ever of late.

"Why, Mr. Maxfield," said the lady, condescendingly, "how do you do? I have been wanting to see you. Come, sit down, and let us talk matters over."

Old Max stood in the doorway glaring at her. "I don't know, ma'am, as there's any matters I want to talk over with you," he returned. "You had better understand that I mean what I say. You'll find it more convenient to believe me at once, and to act accordin'."

"Do you mean to say that you intend to turn me out, Mr. Maxfield?"

"I have given you a legal notice to quit, ma'am. You needn't call it turning you out, unless you like."

He had begun to move away, when Mrs. Errington exclaimed, "But I really don't comprehend this at all! What will Rhoda think of it?"

Maxfield stopped, hesitatingly, with his hand on the banisters at the top of the landing. "Rhoda?" said he gruffly. "Oh, Rhoda has nothing to say to it, one way or t'other."

"But I want to have something to say to her! I assure you it was a great disappointment to me not to find Rhoda here on my return. I'm very fond of her; and shall continue to be so, as long as she merits it. It is not her fault, poor girl, if—other people forget themselves."

Maxfield took his hand off the banisters and turned round. "Since you're so fond of Rhoda," he said, with a queer expression on his sour old face, "you'll be glad to know where she is, and the company she's in."

"I know that she is at the seaside with my friends, Mrs. and Miss Bodkin."

"She is at the seaside with *her* friends, Mrs. and Miss Bodkin. Miss Minnie is a real lady, and she understands how to treat Rhoda, and knows that the Lord has made a lady of Rhoda by natur'."

Mrs. Errington stared in utter astonishment. The suspicion began to form and strengthen itself in her mind that the old man was positively out of his senses. If so, his insanity had taken an extremely unpleasant turn for her.

"I really was not prepared for being turned out of my lodgings after all these years," she said, reverting to the point that most nearly touched herself.

"I've not been prepared for a many things as have happened after all these years. But I'm ready to meet 'em when they come."

"Well, but now, Mr. Maxfield, let us see if we cannot make an arrangement. If you have any different views about the rent, I——"

"The rent! What do you think your bit of a rent matters to me? I want the rooms for the use of my daughter, Miss Maxfield, and there's an end of it."

"Oh, he certainly cannot be in his right senses to address me in this manner!" thought Mrs. Errington.

Maxfield went on, "I see you've got a box of

rubbish there, littering about the place. I give you warning not to unpack any more here, for out everything 'll have to go on the twenty-seventh of this month, as sure as my name's Jonathan Maxfield!"

"Mr. Maxfield! You are certainly forgetting yourself. Rubbish, indeed! These are a few—a very few—of the valuable wedding presents sent to my son and daughter by Lady Seely."

Old Max made a grating sound which was intended for a laugh, although his bushy grey eyebrows were drawn together in a heavy frown the while. Then he suddenly burst out in a kind of cold fury. "Pooh!" he cried. "Presents! Valuable presents! You don't deceive anybody by that! Look here—if the old carpet or any of the furniture in this room would be of any assistance to you, you can take it! I'll give it to you—a free gift! The place is going to be done up and new furnished for Miss Maxfield. Furnished handsome, fit for a young lady of property. Fit for a young lady that will have a sum o' money on the day she marries—if I'm pleased with her choice—as 'll make some folks' mouths water. It won't be reckoned by twenties, nor yet by hundreds, won't Miss Maxfield's fortin'! You can take the old carpet, and mahogany table, and the high-backed chairs, and put 'em among your valuable presents. They're too old-fashioned for Miss Maxfield's draw-

ing-room!" And with a repetition of the grating laugh, old Max tramped heavily downstairs, and was heard to bang the door of his own parlour.

Mrs. Errington sat motionless for nearly a quarter of an hour, staring at the open door. "Mad!" she exclaimed at length, drawing a long breath. "Quite mad! But I wonder if there is any truth in what he says about Rhoda's money? Dear me, why she'll be quite a catch!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Meanwhile Rhoda, at Duckwell Farm, supposed herself to be too unhappy to care much for anything. She did not have a fever, nor fall into a consumption, nor waste away visibly; but she passed hours crying alone in her own room, or sitting idle-handed, whilst her thoughts languidly retraced the past, or strove to picture what sort of a lady Algernon's wife might be. Headaches, pallid cheeks, and red eyes resulted from these solitary hours. Mrs. Seth Maxfield wondered what had come to the girl, having no suspicion that young Errington's marriage could be more to Rhoda than an interesting subject for gossip.

Old Jonathan went over to Duckwell immediately after receiving the first newspaper, sent by Mrs. Errington from Westmoreland.

The announcement of the intended wedding had taken him wholly by surprise. It would be hard to say whether wrath or amazement pre-

dominated in his mind, on first reading the paragraph which Mrs. Errington had so complacently marked with red ink. But it is not at all hard to say which feeling predominated within an hour after having read it.

According to old Max's judgment, there was not one extenuating circumstance in Algernon's behaviour; not one plea to be urged on his behalf. Utter vindictive anger filled the old man's soul as he read. He had been deceived, played upon, laughed at by this boy! That was the first, and, perhaps, the most venomous of his mortifications. But many other stinging thoughts rankled in his mind. David Powell had been right! That was almost unendurable. As to Rhoda, old Max could not, in the mood he was then in, contemplate her being bowed down by grief and disappointment. He would have her raise her head, and revenge herself on her faithless lover. He would have her successful, admired, and prosperous. He would have her trample on Algernon's pride and poverty with all the insolence of wealth. Even his beloved money, so hardly earned, so eagerly hoarded, seemed to him, for the first time in his life, to be of small account in comparison with a sentiment.

He took his Bible, and gloated over menaces of vengeance and threats of destruction. Future condemnation was, no doubt, in store for Algernon Errington. But that was too vague and too distant

a prospect to appease old Max's stomach for revenge. He wanted to see his enemy in the dust, and that his enemy should be seen there by others. In the midst of his reading, he suddenly recollected the acknowledgment he held of Algernon's debt to him, and jumped up and ran to his strong-box to feast his eyes on it. It seemed almost like a clear leading from on High that the I.O.U. should come into his head just then, old Max thought. He was not the first, nor the worst man who has wrested Scripture into the service of his own angry passions.

Then he sent to order a gig from the "Blue Bell," and set out for Duckwell Farm.

"I hope your father isn't sickening for any disease, or going to get a stroke, or something," said Betty Grimshaw to her nephew James. "But I never see anybody's face such a colour out of their coffin. It's a greeny grey, that's what it is. And he was frowning like thunder."

But Jonathan Maxfield's disorder was not of the body. He arrived at Duckwell unexpectedly, but his arrival did not cause any particular surprise. He had business transactions to discuss with his son Seth, to whom he had advanced money on mortgage. And then there was Rhoda staying at the farm, and, of course, her father would like to see Rhoda.

Rhoda was called from her own room, and came

down, pale and nervous. She dreaded meeting her father. Did he, or did he not, know the news from Westmoreland? It had only come to Duckwell Farm by means of Mr. Pawkins's servants. It might possibly not yet have reached Whitford.

On his side, old Max took care to say nothing about the *Applethwaite Advertiser*. He had destroyed that journal before leaving home, placing it in the heart of the kitchen fire, and holding it there with the poker, until the remains of it fluttered up the chimney in black, impalpable fragments.

But old Max had brought another document in his pocket, which had been placed in his hand just as he was starting in the gig. It was a letter directed to Miss Rhoda Maxfield, High Street, Whitford. And this he pulled out almost immediately on seeing Rhoda. A glance at her face sufficed to show him that she was unhappy and dispirited. "She has heard it!" he thought. And something like an anathema upon Algernon followed the thought in his mind.

The old man's countenance was not so clearly read by his daughter; indeed, she hardly raised her eyes to his, but received his kiss in silence.

"I'm afraid, father, you'll not find Rhoda's looks doing us credit," said Mrs. Seth. "Why or wherefore I don't know, but these last days she has been as peaky as can be."

"It's the heat, maybe," said old Max shortly and withdrew his own and Mrs. Seth's attention from the girl, as she read the letter he handed to her. Rhoda was grateful for this forbearance on her father's part, although it fluttered her, too, a little, as proving that he was aware of the cause of her dejection, and anxious to shield it from observation.

The letter was from Minnie Bodkin. She had written it almost immediately on hearing of Algernon's intended marriage. It invited Rhoda, if her father would consent, to visit the Bodkins during the remainder of their stay at the seaside. There was no word of allusion to the Erringtons in the letter. Minnie only said, "Mamma and I remember that your cheeks had lost their roses, somewhat, when we left Whitford. And we think that a breath of sea-breeze may blow them back again. It is some time since you had complete change of air. Tell Mr. Maxfield we will take good care of you." And in a postscript Mrs. Bodkin had added, in her small running hand, "Do come, my dear. We shall be very glad to have you. Dr. Bodkin bids me send you his love."

It had been no slight effort of self-conquest which had made Minnie Bodkin send for Rhoda, to stay with her at the seaside, and had enabled her to endure the girl's daily presence, and to stand her friend in word and deed, throughout the weeks

which succeeded the announcement of Algernon's marriage.

To be kind to Rhoda at a distance would have been pleasant enough. Minnie would willingly, nay, gladly, have served the girl in any way which should not have necessitated frequent personal communion with her. But she told herself unflinchingly that if she really meant to keep her promise to David Powell, she must do so at some cost of self-sacrifice. The only efficacious thing she could do for Rhoda was to take her away from Whitford scenes and Whitford people for a time; to take her out of the reach of gossiping tongues and unsympathising eyes, and to give her the support of a friendly presence when she should be obliged to face Whitford once more. This would be efficacious help to Rhoda; and Minnie resolved to give it to her. But it was a task to which she felt considerable repugnance. There was an invisible barrier between herself and pretty, gentle, winning Rhoda Maxfield.

It is curious to consider of how small importance to most of us actions are, as compared with motives. And perhaps nothing contributes more to hasty accusations of ingratitude than forgetfulness of this truth. We are more affected by what people mean than by what they say, and by what they feel than by what they do. Only when meaning and feeling harmoniously inform the dry

husk of words and deeds, can we bring our hearts to receive the latter thankfully, however kind they may sound or seem to uninterested spectators. The egotism of most of us is too exacting to permit of our judging our friends' behaviour from any abstract point of view; and to be done good to for somebody else's sake, or even for the sake of a lofty principle, seldom excites very lively satisfaction.

Thus Rhoda reproached herself for the unaccountable coldness with which she received Miss Bodkin's kindness; having only a dim consciousness that Miss Bodkin's kindness was prompted by motives excellent indeed, but which had little to do with personal sympathy with herself.

She silently handed the letter to her father, and turned away to the window. Mrs. Seth bustled out of the room, saying that she must get ready "a snack of something" for Mr. Maxfield after his drive, and the father and daughter were left alone together.

Jonathan Maxfield's face brightened wonderfully as he read Minnie's gracious words. A glow of pleasure came over his hard features. But it was not a very agreeable sort of pleasure to behold, being considerably mingled with malicious triumph. Here was a well-timed circumstance indeed! What could Powell, or such as Powell, say now? Let the

Erringtons behave as they might, it was clear henceforward that Rhoda had not been received amongst gentlefolks solely on their account. His girl was liked and made much of for her own sake.

"Well," said he, "this is a very pretty letter of Miss Minnie's; very pretty indeed." He did not allow his voice to express his exultation, but spoke in his usual harsh, grumbling tones.

"Yes," answered Rhoda, tremulously, "it is very kind of Miss Minnie, and of dear Mrs. Bodkin; wonderfully kind! But I—I don't think I want to go, father."

"Not want to go? Nonsense! That's mere idle nonsense. Of course you will go. I shall take you down by the coach myself."

"Oh thank you, father, but—I really don't want change. I don't care about going to the seaside."

The old man turned upon her almost savagely. "I say you shall go. You must go. Are you to creep into a hole like a sick beast of the field, and hide yourself from all eyes? There, there," he added in a gentler tone, drawing her towards him, as he saw the tears begin to gather in her eyes, "I am not chiding you, Rhoda. But it will be good for you to accept this call from your kind friends. It will be good for mind and body. You

will be quiet there, among fresh scenes and fresh faces. And you will return to Whitford in the company of these gentlefolks, who, it is clear, are minded to stand your friends under all circumstances. Seth's wife is a worthy woman, but she is not a companion for you, Rhoda."

One phrase of this speech did seem to offer a glimpse of consolation to Rhoda; the promise, namely, of quiet and fresh scenes, where she and her belongings were utterly unknown. But her father did not know that Minnie Bodkin understood her little love-story from first to last; and that Minnie Bodkin's presence and companionship might not be calculated to pour the waters of oblivion into her heart. Still she reflected, a day must come when she would have to face Miss Minnie, and all the other Whitford people who knew her. There was no chance of her dying at once and being taken away from it all! And Rhoda's teaching had made her shrink from the thought of desiring death, as from something vaguely wicked. On the whole, it might be the best thing for her to go to the Bodkins. She would better have liked to continue her solitary rambles in Pudcombe Woods or the meadows at Duckwell; only that now the pain awaited her, every evening, at the farm, of hearing Algernon's marriage discussed and speculated on. She could not shut out

the topic. On the whole, then, it might be the best thing she could do, to get away from Whitford gossip for a time.

These considerations Rhoda brought before her own mind, not with any idea that they could avail to decide her line of conduct, but by way of reconciling herself to the line of conduct she should be compelled to take. It never entered her head that any resistance would be possible when once her father had said, "You must go."

"Very well, father," she answered meekly, after a short pause.

The Bodkins' invitation was duly communicated to Seth and his wife. And it was arranged that Rhoda should start from the farm without returning to Whitford at all, as a cross road could be reached from Duckwell, where the coach would stop to pick up passengers. "If there's any garments you require, beyond those you have here, your aunt Betty shall send them over by the carrier, to-morrow," said Mr. Maxfield.

Mrs. Seth protested (not without a spice of malice) that Rhoda could not possibly want any more clothes, for that she was rigged out already fit for a princess. Nevertheless there did arrive from Whitford several fresh additions to Rhoda's wardrobe, inclosed in a brand-new black trunk studded with brass-headed nails, and with the

initials R. M. traced out in the same shining materials on the lid.

"Your father's well-nigh soft-headed about that girl," said Mrs. Seth to her husband, as they stood watching the father and daughter drive away together.

"H'm!" grunted Seth.

His wife went on, "We may make up our minds as our little ones will never be a penny the better for your father's money. I'm as sure as sure, it'll all go to Rhoda."

"As to his will, you may be right," returned Seth. "But I have good hopes that father will cancel that mortgage he holds on the home farm. If he does that, we mustn't growl too much. 'Tis a good lump o' money. And it would come a deal handier to me if I could have the land free now, than if I waited for father's death. He's tough, is father. And the Lord knows I don't wish him dead neither."

In this way Rhoda Maxfield went down to the seaside place where the Bodkins were staying, spent about three weeks with them there, and returned in their company to Whitford, to find Mrs. Errington no longer an inmate of her father's house, the old sitting-room decorated and refurnished very smartly, and all the circle with whom she had become acquainted at Dr. Bodkin's

on the tiptoe of expectation to behold the Honourable Mrs. Algernon Errington, whose arrival was looked forward to with an amount of interest only understood by those who have ever lived an unoccupied life in a remote provincial town.

CHAPTER IX.

We have already been present at more than one social gathering at Dr. Bodkin's house. But these entertainments have been of an informal character, and the guests at them all persons in the habit of meeting each other very frequently. On Mr. and Mrs. Algernon Errington's arrival in Whitford, after their marriage, Dr. and Mrs. Bodkin issued cards for an evening party, and invited the leading personages of their acquaintance to meet the bride and bridegroom.

Mrs. Errington was in high delight. She appreciated this attention from her old friends very highly. Castalia, it was true, looked discontented and disdainful about the whole affair; and demanded to know why she must be dragged out to these people's stupid parties before she had had time to turn round in her own house. But then, as Mrs. Errington reflected, Castalia did not understand Whitford society. "The fact is, my

dear," said her mother-in-law with suavity, "it may be all a very trumpery business in your eyes, and after the circles you have moved in, but I assure you it is considered a very desirable thing here to have the *entrée* to Dr. Bodkin's. And then they scarcely ever entertain on a showy scale; nothing but a few friends, tea and cake, your rubber, and a tray afterwards. But, for this occasion, I hear there are great preparations going on. They won't dance, because Minnie can't stand the vibration. But there will be quite a large gathering. Of course, my dear, it is not what I was accustomed to at Ancram Park. But they are most kind, well-meaning people. And Minnie is highly accomplished; even learned, I believe."

"I hate blue-stockings," returned Mrs. Algernon with a shrug.

"Oh! but Minnie is not the least blue in her manners! Indeed, her knowing Greek has ever been a mystery to me; for I assure you she is extremely handsome, and has, I think, the finest pair of eyes I ever saw in my life. But I suppose it is accounted for by her affliction, poor thing!"

Castalia had darted a quick, suspicious glance at her husband on hearing of Minnie's beauty, but relapsed into languid indifference when she was told that Miss Bodkin was a confirmed invalid, suffering from disease of the spine.

In other circles Mrs. Errington was by no means so cool and condescending in speaking of the doctor's projected party. The check administered to her exultation by Castalia's chilly indifference only caused a fuller ebullition of it in other directions. She overwhelmed her new landlady by the magnitude and magnificence of her "Ancramisms"—I have already asked permission to use the phrase in these pages—and was looked up to by that simple soul as a very exalted personage; for the new landlady was no other than the widow Thimbleby.

Mrs. Errington occupied the two rooms on the first-floor above Mr. Diamond's parlours. The place was smaller and poorer altogether than Maxfield's house, although it did not yield to it in cleanliness. Here was Mrs. Errington's old blue china set forth on a side-table in the little oblong drawing-room; and her work-box with its amber satin and silver implements; and the faded miniatures hung over the mantelpiece. Also there was a square of substantial, if somewhat faded, carpet in the middle of Mrs. Thimbleby's threadbare drugget, a mahogany table, and a roomy, comfortable easy-chair, all of which we have seen before.

In a word, Mrs. Errington had taken advantage of old Max's somewhat rash offer, and had carried away with her such articles of fur-

niture out of her old quarters as she fancied might be useful.

Mrs. Errington took some credit to herself for her magnanimity in so doing. "I could not refuse the poor man," she said to Mrs. Thimbleby. "I have lived many years in his house, and although he was led away by mistaken ambition to want his drawing-room for his own use, and certainly did cause me great inconvenience at a moment when I was up to my eyes in important business, yet I could not refuse to accept his little peace-offering. A lady does not quarrel with that sort of person, you know. And, poor old man, I believe he was dreadfully cut up at my going away when it came to the point, and would have given anything to keep me. But I said, 'No, Mr. Maxfield, that is impossible. I have made other arrangements; and, in short, I cannot be troubled any more about this matter. But to show that I bear no malice, and that I shall not withdraw my countenance from your daughter, I am willing to accept the trifles you press upon me.' He was a good deal touched by my taking the things; poor, foolish, misguided old man!"

"Well, it was real Christian of you, ma'am," said simple Mrs. Thimbleby.

The day of the party at Dr. Bodkin's arrived; and there was as intense an excitement connected

with its advent as if it were to bring a county ball, or even a royal drawing-room. Whether a satin train, lappets and feathers, be intrinsically more important and worthy objects of anxiety than a white muslin frock and artificial roses, I do not presume to decide. Only I can unhesitatingly assert that the Misses Rose and Violet McDougall could not have given their female attendant more trouble about the preparation and putting on of the latter adornments—which formed their simple and elegant attire on this occasion—if they had been duchesses, and their gowns cloth of gold.

Miss Chubb, too, contemplated her new dress of a light blue colour, laid out upon her bed, with great interest and satisfaction. And when her toilet for the evening was completed, she had more little gummed rings of hair on her cheeks and forehead than had ever before been beheld there at one time.

The company began to assemble in Dr. Bodkin's drawing-rooms about half-past eight o'clock. There were all our old acquaintances—Mr. Smith, the surgeon, and his wife; Mr. and Mrs. Dockett, with Miss Alethea, now promoted to long dresses and "grown-up" young-ladyhood. There was Orlando Pawkins; Mr. Warlock, the curate; and Colonel Whistler, with his charming nieces. Miss Chubb had dined with the Bodkins in the middle of the

day, and, after being of great assistance to the mistress of the house in the preparation of her supper-table, had returned to her own home to dress, and consequently arrived upon the festive scene rather later than would otherwise have been the case. But she was not the last guest to arrive. Mr. Diamond came in after her; and so did one or two families from the neighbourhood of Whitford. ("County people," Miss Chubb said in a loud whisper to Rose McDougall, who replied snappishly, "Of course! We know them very well. Have visited them for years.")

"This is a brilliant scene," said good-natured Miss Chubb, turning to Mr. Warlock, whom Fate had thrown into her neighbourhood. Mr. Warlock agreed with her that it was very brilliant; and, indeed, Dr. Bodkin's drawing-rooms, well lighted with wax candles, and with abundance of hot-house flowers tastefully arranged, and relieved against the rich crimson and oak furniture, were exceedingly cheerful, pleasant, and picturesque. There was an air of comfort and good taste about the rooms—a habitable, home-like air—not always to be found in more splendid dwellings.

On her crimson lounging-chair reclined Minnie Bodkin. Her dress was of heavy cream-white silk, with gold ornaments. She wore nothing in her abundant dark hair, and her pale face seemed to many who looked upon it that evening to be more

lovely than ever. Her lips had a tinge of red in them, and her eyes were full of lustre. There was a suppressed excitement about her looks and manner, which lighted up her perfectly-moulded features with a strange beauty that struck all observers. Even the McDougalls could not but admit that Minnie looked very striking, but added that she was a little too theatrically got up, didn't you think so? That was poor Minnie's failing. All for effect! "And," added Rose, "she has a good foil in that little pink and white creature who sits in the corner beside her chair, and never moves. I suppose she is told to do it. But the idea of dressing that chit up in a violet silk gown fit for a married woman! And she has no figure to carry it off. I really think it rather a strong measure on the Bodkins' part to ask us all to meet a girl of such very low origin on equal terms. But there it is, you see! Poor dear Minnie delights in doing startling things, unlike other people. And, of course, her parents refuse her nothing."

Miss Rose's opinion of Rhoda Maxfield's insignificant appearance was not, however, shared by many persons present. Several young gentlemen, and more than one old gentleman, vied with each other in offering her cups of tea, and paying her various little attentions according to their opportunities. Even old Colonel Whistler, when he thought himself unobserved by his nieces, sidled

up to pretty Rhoda Maxfield, and was heard to say to one of the "county" gentlemen, "She's the prettiest girl I've seen this many a day, by George! And I know a pretty girl when I see one, sir; or used to, once upon a time!"

To Rhoda, all the strangers who spoke and looked so kindly were merely troublesome. Her colour went and came, her heart beat with anxiety. She started nervously every time the door opened. She could think only of Algernon and Algernon's wife. She made a silent and very earnest prayer that she might be strengthened to sit still and quiet when they should appear, for she had had serious apprehensions lest she should be irresistibly impelled to start up and run away, as soon as she saw them.

It was in vain that young Mr. Pawkins hovered near her, inviting her to accept his arm into the tea-room; it was in vain that old Colonel Whistler softened his martinet voice to ask her, with paternal tenderness, how she had enjoyed her stay at the seaside, and to say that, if one might judge by her looks, she had derived great benefit from the change of air. In the words of the song, "All men else seemed to her like shadows." She was in a dream, with the consciousness of an impending awakening, which she half longed for, half dreaded.

Two persons watched over her, and covered

the mistakes she made in her nervous trepidation. Matthew Diamond and Minnie Bodkin exerted themselves to shield her from importunate observation, and to give her time to recover her self-possession, if that might be possible. Diamond was in good spirits. He could wait, he could be patient, he could be silent now, with a good heart. Algernon's marriage had opened a bright vista of hope before him; and perhaps he had never felt so disposed to condone and excuse his old pupil's faults and failings as at the present moment. "Minnie is a good creature," he thought, with a momentary, grateful diversion of his attention from Rhoda, "to keep my timid birdie so carefully under her wing! She might do it with a little more softness of manner. But we cannot change people's natures."

Meanwhile Minnie reclined in her chair, watching his tender lingering looks at Rhoda, and his complete indifference to everyone else, with a heartache which might have excused even less "softness of manner" than Diamond thought she displayed towards the girl beside her.

At length a little commotion, and movement among the persons standing near the door, announced a new arrival. Rhoda felt sick, and grasped the back of Minnie's chair so hard that her little glove was split by the force of the pressure. But that horrible sensation passed away

in a few seconds. And then, looking up with renewed powers of seeing and hearing, she perceived that Mrs. Errington had made her entrance alone, and was holding forth in her mellow voice to Dr. and Mrs. Bodkin, and a knot of other persons in the centre of the room.

Mrs. Errington was radiant. She nodded and smiled to one and another with an almost royal suavity and condescension. She was attired in a rich dove-coloured silk gown (Lord Seely's gift to her at her son's wedding), and wore rose-coloured ribbons in her lace cap, and looked altogether as handsome and happy a matron of her years as you would easily find in a long summer's day.

"I have sent back the carriage for them, dear Mrs. Bodkin," she was saying, when Rhoda gained self-possession enough to take account of her words. "Naughty Castalia was not ready. So I said, 'My dear children, I shall go on without you, and put in an appearance for one member of the family at least!' So here I am. And my boy and girl will be here directly. And how is dear Minnie?—How d'ye do, Colonel?—Good evening, Miss Chubb.—Ah, Alethea! Papa and mamma quite well?—Oh, there she is! How are you, my dear Minnie? But I need not ask, for I never saw you looking so well?"

By this time Mrs. Errington had arrived at Minnie's chair, and stooped to kiss her. Almost

at the same moment she caught sight of Rhoda, who shrank back a little, flushed and trembling. Mrs. Errington thought she very well understood the cause of this, and thought to herself, "Poor child, she is ashamed of her father's behaviour!"

"What, my pretty Rhoda!" she said aloud. And, drawing the girl to her, kissed her warmly. "I'm very glad to see you again, child," continued Mrs. Errington; "I began to fancy we were not to meet any more. You must come and see me, and spend a long day. I suppose that won't be against the laws of the Medes and Persians, eh?"

The familiar voice, the familiar looks, the kind manner of her old friend, helped to put Rhoda at her ease. The fact, too, that Mrs. Errington had no suspicion of her feelings was calming. Mrs. Errington was not apt to suspect people of any feeling but gratification, when she was talking to them.

In the full glow of her satisfaction Mrs. Errington even condescended to be gracious to Matthew Diamond, who came forward to offer his congratulations. "Why, yes, Mr. Diamond," said the good lady, "it is indeed a marriage after my own heart. And I do not think I am blinded by the partiality of a mother, when I say the bride's family are quite as gratified at the alliance

as I am. Do you know that one of Mrs. Algernon's relatives is the Duke of Mackelpie and Brose? A distant relative, it is true. But these Scotch clans, you know, call cousins to the twentieth degree! His Grace sent Castalia a beautiful wedding present: a cairn-gorm, set in solid silver. So characteristic, you know! and so distinguished! No vulgar finery. Oh, the Broses and the Kauld-kails have been connected from time immemorial."

Then Colonel Whistler came up, and joined the circle round Mrs. Errington's chair; and Miss Chubb, whose curiosity generally got the better of her dignity when it came to a struggle between the two. To them sauntered up Alethea Dockett on the arm of Mr. Pawkins. The latter, finding it impossible to draw Rhoda into conversation, had philosophically transferred his attentions to the smiling, black-eyed Miss Alethea, much to the disgust and scorn of the McDougalls.

Mrs. Errington soon had a numerous audience around her chair, and she improved the occasion by indulging in such flourishes as fairly staggered her hearers. Her account of the bride's trousseau was almost oriental in the splendour and boldness of its imagery. And Matthew Diamond began to believe that, with very small encouragement, she might be led on to endow her daughter-in-law with the roc's egg, which even Aladdin could

not compass the possession of, when a diversion took place.

Algernon Errington appeared close behind Miss Chubb, and said, almost in her ear, and in his old jaunty way, "Well, is this the way you cut an old friend? Oh, Miss Chubb, I couldn't have believed it of you!"

The little spinster turned round quite fluttered, with both her fat little hands extended. "Algy!" she cried. "But I beg pardon; I ought not to call you by that familiar name now, I suppose!"

"By what name, then? I hope you don't mean to cut me in earnest!"

Then there was a general hand-shaking and exchange of greetings among the group. Rhoda was still in her old place behind Minnie's chair, and was invisible at first to one coming to the circle from the other end of the room, as Algernon had done. But in a minute he saw her, and for once his self-possession temporarily forsook him.

If he had walked into the sitting-room at old Max's, and seen Rhoda there, in her accustomed place by his mother's knee, with the accustomed needlework in her hand, and dressed in the accustomed grey stuff frock, he might have accosted her with tolerable coolness and *aplomb*. The old associations, which might have unnerved some soft-hearted persons, would have strengthened Algernon

by vividly recalling his own habitual ascendancy and superiority over his former love. But instead of the Rhoda he had been used to see, here was a lovely young lady, elegantly, even richly, dressed, received among the chief personages of her little world evidently on equal terms, and looking as gracefully in her right place there as the best of them.

Algernon stood for a second, staring point-blank at her, unable to move or to speak. His embarrassment gave her courage. Not less to her own surprise than to that of the two who were watching her so keenly, she rose from her chair, and held out her hand with the little torn glove on it, saying in a soft voice, that was scarcely at all unsteady, "How do you do, Mr. Errington?"

Algernon shook her proffered hand, and murmured something about having scarcely recognised her. Then someone else began to speak to him, and he turned away, as Rhoda resumed her seat, trembling from head to foot.

So the dreaded meeting was over! Let her see him again as often as she might, no second interview could be looked forward to with the same anxious apprehension as the first. She had seen Algernon once more! She had spoken to him, and touched his hand!

It seemed very strange that no outward thing

should have changed, when such a moving drama had been going on within her heart! But not one of the faces around her showed any consciousness that they had witnessed a scene from the old, old story; that the clasp of those two young hands had meant at once, "Hail!" and "Farewell!"—farewell to the sweet, foolish dream, to the innocent tenderness of youth and maiden, to the soft thrilling sense of love's presence, that was wont to fill so many hours of life with a diffused sweetness, like the perfume of hidden flowers!

No; the world seemed to go on much as usual. The McDougalls came flouncing up close beside her, to tell Minnie that they had just been introduced to "the Honourable Mrs. Errington;" and a very young gentleman (one of Dr. Bodkin's senior scholars) asked Rhoda if she had had any tea yet, and begged to recommend the pound-cake, from his own personal experience.

"Go with Mr. Ingleby," said Minnie, authoritatively. "I put Miss Maxfield under your charge, Ingleby, and shall hold you responsible for her being properly attended to in the tea-room."

The lad, colouring with pleasure, led off the unresisting Rhoda. All her force of will, all her courage, seemed to have been expended in the effort of greeting Algernon. She simply obeyed Miss Bodkin with listless docility. But, on reaching

the tea-room, she was conscious that her friend had done wisely and kindly in sending her away, for there were but two persons there. One was Mr. Dockett, who was as inveterate a tea-drinker as Doctor Johnson; and the other was the Reverend Peter Warlock, hovering hungrily near the cake-basket. Neither of these gentlemen took any special notice of her, and she was able to sit quiet and unobserved. Her cavalier conscientiously endeavoured to fulfil Miss Minnie's injunctions, but was greatly disappointed by the indifference which Rhoda manifested to the pound-cake. However, he endeavoured to make up for her shortcomings by devouring such a quantity of that confection himself as startled even Dr. Bodkin's old footman, accustomed to the appetites of many a generation of schoolboys.

But all this time where was the bride? The party was given especially in her honour, and to omit her from any description of it would be an unpardonable solecism.

The Honourable Mrs. Algernon Ancram Errington sat on a sofa in the principal drawing-room, with a discontented expression of countenance, superciliously surveying the company through her eye-glass, and asking where Algernon was, if he were absent from her side for five minutes. Castalia was looking in better health than when we first

had the honour of making her acquaintance. She had grown a trifle stouter—or less lean. Her sojourn in Westmoreland had been more favourable to her looks than the fatigues of a London season, which, under other circumstances, she would have been undergoing. Happiness is said to be a great beautifier. And it was to be supposed that Castalia, having married the man of her heart, was happy. But yet the fretful creases had not vanished from her face; and there was even a more suspicious watchfulness in her bright, deeply-set eyes than formerly.

Perhaps it may be well to record a few of the various verdicts passed on the bride's manners and appearance by our Whitford friends after that first evening. Possibly an impartial judgment may be formed from them; but it will be seen that opinions were strongly conflicting.

Said Dr. Bodkin to his wife, "What can the boy have been thinking of to marry that woman? A sickly, faded, fretful-looking person, nearly ten years his senior! I can forgive a generous mistake, but not a mean one. If he had run away with Ally Dockett from her boarding-school, it would, no doubt, have been a misfortune, but—I don't know that one would have loved him much the less!"

"Oh, doctor!"

"I am not counselling young gentlemen to run

away with young ladies from boarding-schools, my dear. But—I'm afraid this has been a marriage wholly of interest and ambition on his side. Ah! I hoped better things of Errington." And the doctor went on shaking his head for full a minute.

Said Mrs. Smith to Mrs. Dockett, "What do you think of the bride?" Said Mrs. Dockett to Mrs. Smith, "A stuck-up, unpleasant little thing! And I do wish somebody would tell her to keep her gown on her shoulders. I assure you, if I were to see my Ally half undressed in that fashion, I should box her ears. And Ally has a very pretty pair of shoulders, though I say it. She is not a bag of bones, like Mrs. Algernon, at all events."

Said Miss Chubb to her old woman servant, "Well, the Honourable Mrs. Algernon Errington is very *distangy* looking, Martha. That's a French word that means—means out of the common, aristocratic, you know. Very *distangy*, certainly! But she lacks sentiment, in my opinion. And her outline is very sharp, Martha. I prefer a rounder contour, both of face and figure. Some of the ladies found fault with her because of her low dress. But that—as I happen to know—is quite the custom with our upper classes in town. Mrs. Figgins's—wife of the Bishop of Plumbunn, you know, Martha—Mrs. Figgins's sister, who married Sir William Wick, of the Honourable Company of

Tallow Chandlers, I believe—that's a kind of City society for dining sumptuously, Martha; you mustn't suppose it has anything to do with selling tallow candles! Well, Lady Wick sat down to dinner in low, every day of her life!"

Mr. Diamond and young Pawkins walked a little way together from the doctor's house to the "Blue Bell" inn. The master of Pudcombe Hall, on attempting to resume his acquaintance with the bride, had been received with scant courtesy. But this was not so much because Castalia intended to be specially uncivil to him, as because at that moment it happened, unfortunately, that she saw her husband in a distant part of the room talking to Minnie Bodkin with an air of animation.

"By Jove!" cried the ingenuous Pawkins, "I don't envy Errington. His wife looks so uncommon ill-tempered, and turns up her honourable nose at everybody."

"She does not turn up her nose at him," returned Diamond. "And Errington will not be over sensitive on behalf of his friends."

"Oh, well! But she's so crabbed, somehow. One expects a bride to have some kind of softness in her manners, and—hang it all, there's not a particle of romance about her."

"My dear fellow, if there is in the United Kingdom a young man of three-and-twenty who

can comfortably dispense with romance in his wife, our friend Errington is that young man."

"Oh, well! I know Errington's a very clever fellow, and all that, and perhaps I'm a fool. But I—I shouldn't like my wife to be quite so cool and cutting in her manners, that's all!"

"Neither should I. And perhaps I'm a fool!"

"Shouldn't you, now?" Orlando was encouraged by this admission on Diamond's part, further, to express his opinion that it was all very fine to stick "Honourable" before your name; but that, for his part, he considered little Miss Maxfield to look fifty times more like a lady than Mrs. Algernon. And as for good looks, there was, of course, no comparison. And though Miss Maxfield was too shy and quiet, yet if you offered her any little civility, she thanked you in such a sweet way that a fellow felt as if he could do anything for her; whereas, some women stare at a fellow enough to turn a fellow into stone.

But the Misses McDougall were enthusiastic in their praises of Algernon's wife. They performed a sort of Carmen Amœbœum after this fashion:

Rose. "That sweet creature, the Honourable Mrs. Algernon! I can't get her out of my head."

Violet. "Dear thing! What high-bred manners! And did she tell you that we are posi-

tively related? The Mackelpies, you know, call cousins with us. There was the branch that went off from the elder line of Brose"—&c. &c. &c.

Rose. "Oh yes; one feels at home directly with people of one's own class. How lucky Algernon has been to get such a wife, instead of some chit of a girl who would have had no weight in society!"

Violet. "Yes; but she's quite young enough, Rose?"

Rose. "Oh, dear me, of course! But I meant that Algernon has shown his sense in not selecting a bread-and-butter Miss. I own I detest school-girls."

Violet. "She asked us to go and see her. Do you know I think we were the only girls in the room she seemed to take to at all! Even Minnie Bodkin, now—she was very cool, I thought, to Minnie."

Rose. "My dear child, how often have I told you that the people here have quite a mistaken estimate of Minnie Bodkin? They have just spoiled her. Her airs are really ludicrous. But directly a person of superior birth comes to the place you see how it is! Perhaps you'll believe me another time. I do think you were half inclined to fall down and worship Minnie yourself!"

Violet. "Oh no; not that! But she is very clever, you know. And, in spite of her affliction,

I thought she looked wonderfully handsome to-night."

Rose. (Sharply.) "Pshaw! She was dressed up like an actress. I saw the look Mrs. Algernon gave her. How beautifully Mrs. Algernon had her hair done!"

Violet. "And did you notice that little flounce at the bottom of her dress?"—— &c. &c.

Both. (Almost together.) "Isn't she charming, uncle?"

"Very," answered Colonel Whistler, twirling his moustaches. Then the gallant gentleman, as he took his bed-candle, was heard to mutter something which sounded like "d——d skinny!"

CHAPTER X.

"Love in a cottage" is a time-honoured phrase, which changes its significance considerably, according to the lips that utter it. To some persons, Love in a cottage would be suggestive of dreary obscurity, privation, cold mutton, and one maid-of-all-work. To others, it might mean a villa with its lawn running down to the Thames, a basket-phaeton and pair of ponies, and the modest simplicity of footmen without powder. To another class of minds, again, Love in a cottage might stand for a comprehensive hieroglyph of honest affection, sufficiently robust to live and thrive even on a diet of cold mutton, and warm-blooded enough to defy the nip of poverty's east winds.

Lady Seely had joked, in her cheerful, candid way, with her niece-in-law about her establishment in life, and had said, "Well, Castalia, you'll have love in a cottage, at all events! Some people are worse off. And at your age, you know (quite

between ourselves), you must think yourself lucky to get a husband at all."

Miss Kilfinane had made some retort to the effect that she did not intend to remain all her life in a cottage, with or without love; and that if Lord Seely could do nothing for Ancram, she (Castalia) had other connections who might be more influential.

But, in truth, Castalia did think that she could be quite content to live with Algernon Errington under a thatched roof; having only a conventional and artificial conception of such a dwelling, derived chiefly from lithographed drawing-copies. It was not, of course, that Castalia Kilfinane did not know that thatched hovels are frequently comfortless, ill-ventilated, "the noted haunt of" earwigs, and limited in the accommodation necessary for a genteel family. But such knowledge was packed away in some quite different department of her mind from that which habitually contemplated her own personal existence, present and future. Wiser folks than Castalia are apt to anticipate exceptions to general laws in their own favour.

Castalia was undoubtedly in love with Algernon. That is to say, she would have liked better to be his wife in poverty and obscurity, than to accept a title and a handsome settlement from any other man whom she had ever seen; although she would

probably have taken the latter had the chance been offered to her.

Nor is that bringing so hard an accusation against her as may at first sight appear. She would have liked best to be Algernon's wife; but for penniless Castalia Kilfinane to marry a poor man when she might have had a rich one, would have required her to disregard some of the strongest and most vital convictions of the persons among whom she lived. Let their words be what they might, their deeds irrefragably proved that they held poverty to be the one fatal, unforgiven sin, which so covered any multitude of virtues as utterly to hide and overwhelm them. You could no more expect Castalia to be impervious to this creed, than you could expect a sapling to draw its nourishment from a distant soil, rather than from the earth immediately around its roots. To be sure there have been vigorous young trees that would strike out tough branching fibres to an incredible distance, in search of the food that was best for them. Such human plants are rare; and poor narrow-minded, ill-educated Castalia was not of them.

Had she been much beloved, it is possible that she might have ripened into sweetness under that celestial sunshine. But it was not destined to be hers.

In some natures the giving even of unrequited

love is beautifying to the character. But I think that in such cases the beauty is due to that pathetic compassion which blends with all love of a high nature for a lower one. Do you think that all the Griseldas believe in their lords' wisdom and justice? Do you fancy that the fathers of prodigal sons do not oftentimes perceive the young vagabonds' sins and shortcomings with a terrible perspicuity that pierces the poor fond heart like sharp steel? Do you not know that Cordelia saw more quickly and certainly than the sneering, sycophant courtiers, every weakness and vanity of the rash, choleric old king? But there are hearts in which such knowledge is transmuted not into bitter resentment, but into a yearning, angelic pity. Only, in order to feel this pity, we must rise to some point above the erring one. Now poor Castalia had been so repressed by "low ambition," and the petty influences of a poverty ever at odds with appearances, that the naturally weak wings of her spirit seemed to have lost all power of soaring.

The earliest days Mrs. Algernon Errington spent in her new home were passed in making a series of disagreeable discoveries. The first discovery was that a six-roomed brick cottage is, practically, a far less commodious dwelling than any she had hitherto lived in. The walls of Ivy Lodge (that was the name of the little house,

which had not a twig of greenery to soften its bare red face) appeared so slight that she fancied her conversation could be overheard by the passers-by in the road. The rooms were so small that her dress seemed to fill them to overflowing, although those were not the days of crinolines and long trains. The little staircase was narrow and steep. The kitchen was so close to the living rooms that, at dinner-time, the whole house seemed to exhale a smell of roast mutton. The stowing away of her wardrobe taxed to the utmost the ingenuity of her maid. And the few articles of furniture which Lady Seely had raked out from disused sitting-rooms, appeared almost as Brobdingnagian in Ivy Lodge as real tables and chairs would seem beside the furniture of a doll's house.

A second discovery—made very quickly after her arrival in Whitford—was still more unpleasant. It was this: that a fine London-bred lady's-maid is an inconvenient and unmanageable servant to introduce into a small humble household. Poor Castalia "couldn't think what had come to Slater!" And Slater went about with a thunderous brow and sulky mouth, conveying by her manner a sort of contemptuous compassion for her mistress, and a contempt by no means compassionate for everybody else in the house.

The stout Whitford servant-of-all-work offended

her beyond forgiveness, on the very first day of their acquaintance, by bluntly remarking that well-cooked bacon and cabbage was a good-enough dinner for anybody; and that if Mrs. Slater had see'd as many hungry folks as she (Polly) had, she would say her grace and fall-to with a thankful heart instead of turning up her nose, and picking at good wholesome victuals with a fork! Moreover, Polly was not in the least awe-stricken by Mrs. Slater's black silk gown, or the gold watch she wore at her belt. She observed, cheerfully, that such-like fine toggery was all very well at church or chapel; and, for her part, she always had, and always would, put a bit of a flower in her bonnet on Sundays, and them mississes as didn't like it must get some one else to serve 'em. But, when she was about her work, she liked to be dressed in working clothes. And a servant as wanted to bring second-hand parlour manners into the kitchen seemed to her a poor cretur'—neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red-herring.

All which indignities Slater visited on her mistress, finding it impossible to disconcert or repress Polly, who only laughed heartily at her genteelest flights.

But these things were not the worst. The worst was that Algernon showed very plainly a disinclination to sympathise with his wife's annoyance, and his intention of withdrawing himself from all

domestic troubles, as if he considered them to be clearly no concern of his. Mrs. Errington, indeed, would have come to the rescue of her daughter-in-law, but neither of Mrs. Algernon's servants were disposed to submit to Mrs. Errington's authority. And the good lady was no more inclined than her son to take trouble and expose herself to unpleasantness for any one else's sake.

Castalia and her mother-in-law did not grow more attached to each other the more intimate their acquaintance became. They had one sentiment in common—namely, love for Algernon. But this sentiment did not tend to unite them. Indeed—putting the rivalry of lovers out of the question, of course—it would be a mistake to conclude that because A and B both love C, therefore A and B must love each other. Mrs. Errington thought that Castalia worried Algernon by complaints. Castalia thought that Mrs. Errington was often a thorn in her son's side by reason of her indulgence in the opposite feelings; that is to say, over-sanguine and boastful prognostications.

"My dear Algy," his mother would say, "there is not the least doubt that you have a brilliant career before you. Your talents were appreciated by the highest in the land, directly you became known to them. It is impossible that you should

be left here in the shade. No, no; Whitford won't hold you long. Of that I am certain!"

To which Castalia would reply that Whitford ought never to have held him at all; that the post he filled there was absurdly beneath his standing and abilities, and that Lord Seely would never have dreamt of offering Ancram such a position if it had not been for my lady, who is the most selfish, domineering woman in the world.

"I'm sorry to have to say it, Mrs. Errington, since she is your relation. And you needn't suppose that she cares any the more for Ancram because he's her far-away cousin. At most, she only looks upon him as a kind of poor relation that ought to put up with anything. And she's always abusing her own family. She said to Uncle Val, in my presence, that the Ancrams could never be satisfied, do what you would for them; so he might as well make up his mind to that, first as last. She told me to my face, the week before I was married, that Ancram and I ought to go down on our knees in thankfulness to her, for having got us a decent living. That was pretty impudent from her to a Kilfinane, I think!"

Algernon laughed with impartial good-humour at his mother's rose-coloured visions and his wife's gloomier views; but the good humour was a little cynical, and his eyes had lost their old sparkle

of enjoyment; or, at least, it shone there far less frequently than formerly.

As to his business—his superintendence of the correspondence, by letter, between Whitford and the rest of the civilised world—that, it must be owned, seemed to sit lightly on the new post-master. There was an elderly clerk in the office, named Gibbs. He was uncle to Miss Bodkin's maid Jane and her brother the converted groom, and was himself a member of the Wesleyan Society. Mr. Gibbs had been employed many years in the Whitford Post-office, and understood the routine of its business very well. Algernon relied on Mr. Gibbs, he said, and made himself very pleasant in his dealings with that functionary. What was the use, he asked, of disturbing and harassing a tried servant by a too restless supervision? He thought it best, if you trusted your subordinates at all, to trust them thoroughly.

And, certainly, Mr. Gibbs was very thoroughly trusted; so much so, indeed, that all the trouble and responsibility of the office-work appeared to be shifted on to his shoulders. Yet Mr. Gibbs seemed not to be discontented with this state of things. Possibly he looked forward to promotion. Algernon's wife and mother freely gave it to be understood in the town that Whitford was not destined long to have the honour of retaining Mr. Ancram Errington. Mr. Gibbs did the work;

and, perhaps, he hoped eventually to receive the pay. Why should he not step into the vacant place of postmaster, when his chief should be translated to a higher sphere?

I daresay that, in these times of general reform, of competitive examinations and official purity, no such state of things could be possible as existed in the Whitford Post-office forty odd years ago. I have only faithfully to record the events of my story, and to express my humble willingness to believe that, nowadays, "*nous avons changé tout cela.*" I must, however, be allowed distinctly to assert, and unflinchingly to maintain, that Algernon took no pains to acquire any knowledge of his business; and that, nevertheless, the postal communications between Whitford and the rest of the world appeared to go on much as they had gone on during the reign of his predecessor.

Mr. Gibbs was a close, quiet man, grave and sparing of speech. He had known something of the Erringtons for many years, having been a crony of old Maxfield's once upon a time. Mr. Gibbs remembered seeing Algernon's smiling, rosy face and light figure flitting through the long passage at old Max's in his schoolboy days. He remembered having once or twice met the majestic Mrs. Errington in the doorway; and could recollect quite well how the tinkling sound of the harpsichord and Algy's fresh young voice used to pene-

trate into the back parlour on prayer-meeting nights, and fill the pauses between Brother Jackson's nasal dronings or Brother Powell's passionate supplications. Mr. Gibbs had not then conceived a favourable idea of the Erringtons, looking on them as worldly and unconverted persons, of whom Jonathan Maxfield would do well to purge his house. But Mr. Gibbs kept his official life and his private life very perfectly asunder, and he allowed no sectarian prejudices to make him rusty and unmanageable in his relations with the new postmaster.

Then, Mr. Gibbs was not altogether proof against the charm of Algy's manner. Once upon a time Algy had been pleasant to all the world, for the sheer pleasure of pleasing. Years, in their natural course, had a little hardened the ductility of his compliant manners—a little roughened the smoothness of his once almost flawless temper. But disappointment, and the—to Algernon—almost unendurable sense that he stood lower in his friends' admiration (I do not say estimation) than formerly, had changed him more rapidly than the mere course of time would have done. Still, when Mr. Ancram Errington strongly desired to attract, persuade, or fascinate, there were few persons who could resist him. He found it worth while to fascinate Mr. Gibbs, desiring not only that his clerk should carry his burden for him, but should

carry it so cheerfully and smilingly as to make him feel comfortable and complacent at having made the transfer.

I have said that disappointment had changed Algernon. He was disappointed in his marriage. It was not that he had been a victim to any romantic illusions as regarded his wife. He had had his little love-romance some time ago; had it, and tasted it, and enjoyed it as a child enjoys a fairy tale, feeling that it belongs to quite another realm from the every-day world of nursery dinners, Latin grammars, and torn pinafores, and not in the least expecting to see Fanfreluche fly down the chimney into the school-room, or to find Cinderella's glass slipper on the stairs as he goes up to bed. Romances that touch the fancy only, and in which the heart has no share, are easily put off and on. Algernon had wilfully laid his romance aside, and did not regret it. Castalia's lack of charm, and sweetness, and sympathy would not greatly have troubled him—did he not know it all beforehand? —had she been able to help him into a brilliant position, and to cause him to be received and caressed by her noble relatives and the delightful world of fashionable society. It was not that she failed to put any sunlight into his days, and to fill his home with a sweet atmosphere of love and trust. Algy would willingly enough have dispensed with that sort of sunshine if he could but

have had plenty of wax candles and fine crystal lustres for them to sparkle in. Give him a handsome suite of drawing-rooms, filled with the rich odours of pastille and pot-pourri, and Algy would make no sickly lamentations over the absence of any "sweet atmosphere" such as I have written of above. Only put his attractive figure into a suitable frame, and he would be sure to receive praise and sympathy enough, and to have a pleasant life of it.

No; he could not accuse himself of having been the victim of any sentimental illusion in marrying Castalia. And yet he had been cheated! He had bestowed himself without receiving the due *quid pro quo*. In a word, he began to fear that it had not been worth his while to marry the Honourable Miss Kilfinane. And sometimes the thought darted like a twinge of pain through the young man's mind—might it not have been worth his while to marry someone else?

"Someone else" was talked of as an heiress. "Someone else" was said by the gossips to be so good a match that she might have her pick of the town—aye, and a good chance among the county people! But Algernon smothered down all vain and harassing speculations founded on an "if it had been!" Neither did he by any means hopelessly resign himself to his present position, nor despair of obtaining a better one. He persisted in

looking on his employment as merely provisional and temporary; so that, in fact, the worse things became in his Whitford life, the less he would do to mend them, taking every fresh disgust and annoyance as a new reason why—according to any rationally conceivable theory of events—he must speedily be removed to a region in which a gentleman of his capacities for refined enjoyment might be free to exercise them, untrammelled by vulgar cares.

CHAPTER XI.

It was true that Mrs. Algernon Errington had distinguished the Misses McDougall, by her notice, above all the other ladies whom she met at Dr. Bodkin's. The rest had by no means found favour in her eyes. Minnie Bodkin she decidedly disapproved of. Ally Dockett was "a little black-eyed, fat, flirting thing." The elder ladies were frumps, or frights, or bores. Rhoda Maxfield she had scarcely seen. On the evening of the Bodkins' party, Rhoda, as we know, had kept herself studiously in the background.

Mrs. Errington intended to present Rhoda to her daughter-in-law as her own especial pet and *protégée*, but a favourable moment for fulfilling this intention did not offer itself. Rhoda had not distinctly expressed any unwillingness to be taken to Ivy Lodge, and it could never enter into Mrs. Errington's head to guess that she felt such unwillingness. But in some way the project seemed

to be eluded; so that Castalia had been some weeks in Whitford without making the acquaintance of Miss Maxfield, as she began to be called, even by some of those to whom she had been "Old Max's little Rhoda" all her life.

Castalia, indeed, troubled her head very little about Rhoda, under whatever style or title she might be mentioned. We may be sure that Algernon never spoke to his wife of the old days at the Maxfields; indeed, he eschewed all allusion to that name as much as possible. Castalia knew from Mrs. Errington that there had been a young girl in the house where she had lodged, the daughter of the grocer, who was her landlord; but, being pretty well accustomed to Mrs. Errington's highly-coloured descriptions of things and people, she had paid no attention to that lady's praises of Rhoda's intelligence, good looks, and pretty manners.

No; Castalia troubled not her head about Rhoda. But she was troubled about Minnie Bodkin, of whom she became bitterly jealous. She did not suppose, to be sure, that her husband had ever made love to Miss Bodkin; but she was constantly tormented by the suspicion that Algernon was admiring Minnie, and comparing her beauty, wit, and accomplishments with those of his wife, to the disadvantage of the latter. Not

that she (Castalia) admired her. Far from it! But—she was just the sort of person to be taking with men. She had such a forward, confident, showy way with her!

Some speech of this sort being uttered in the presence of the Misses McDougall, was seized upon, and echoed, and re-echoed, and made much of by those young ladies, who pounced on poor Minnie, and tore her to pieces with great skill and gusto. Violet, indeed, made a feeble protest now and then on behalf of her friend; but how was she to oppose her sister and that sweet Mrs. Algernon? And then, in conscience and candour, she could not but admit that poor dear Minnie had many and glaring faults.

In fact, Rose and Violet McDougall were installed as toadies in ordinary to Castalia. They were her dearest friends; they called her by her Christian-name; they flattered her weaknesses, and encouraged her worst traits; not, we may charitably believe, with the full consciousness of what they were doing. For her part, Castalia soon got into the habit of liking to have these ladies about her. They performed many little offices which saved her trouble; they were devoted to her interests, and brought her news of the doings of the opposite faction. For there was an opposite faction; or Castalia persuaded her-

self that there was. The Bodkins were ranged in it, in her jealous fancy; and so were the Docketts, and one or two more of Algernon's old friends. Miss Chubb she considered to hover as yet on neutral ground. As to the unmarried men—young Pawkins, Mr. Diamond, and the curate of St. Chad's—they were not much taken into account in this species of subterranean warfare, carried on with an arsenal of sneers, stares, slights, hints, coolnesses, bridlings, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

I have said that the warfare was subterranean; occult, as it were. Had the enemy been actuated by similar feelings to those of Castalia and her party, hostilities must have blazed up openly. But most of them did not even know that they were being assailed. Among these unconscious ones were Dr. and Mrs. Bodkin. Minnie had at times a suspicion that Algy's wife disliked her. But then the manners of Algy's wife were not genial or gracious to anyone, and Minnie could not but feel a certain compassion for her, which extinguished resentment at her sour words and ways.

With the rest of the Whitford society, the bride did not enter into intimate, or even amicable, relations. She offended most of the worthy matrons who called on her by merely returning

her card, and not even asking to be admitted to see them. As to offering any entertainment in return for the hospitalities that were offered to her during the first weeks that she dwelt in Whitford, that, Castalia said, was out of the question. How could more than two persons sit at table in her little dining-room? And how was it possible to receive company in Ivy Lodge?

But Whitford was not quite of her opinion in this matter. It was true her rooms were small; but were they smaller than Mrs. Jones's, who gave three tea-parties every year, and received her friends in detachments? Why was Ivy Lodge less adapted for festive purposes than Dr. Smith's house in the High Street?—a queer, ancient, crooked nook of a dwelling, squeezed in between two larger neighbours, with a number of tiny dark rooms like closets; in which, nevertheless, some of the best crumpets and tea-cakes known to that community, not to mention little lobster suppers in the season, had been consumed by the Smiths' friends with much satisfaction. As Mrs. Dockett observed, it was not so much what you gave as the spirit you gave it in that mattered! And she was not ashamed, not she, to recall the time, in the beginning of Mr. Dockett's career, when she had with her own hands prepared a welsh rabbit and a jorum of spiced ale for a little

party of friends, having nothing better to offer them for supper. In a word, it was Whitford's creed that even the most indigestible food, freely bestowed, might bless him that gave and him that received; and that if the Algernon Erringtons did not offer anyone so much as a cup of tea in their house, the real reason was to be sought in the lady's proud reserve and a general state of feeling which Mrs. Dockett described as "stuck-upishness."

Castalia was unaccustomed to walking, and disliked that exercise. Riding was out of her power, no saddle-horse that would carry a lady being kept for hire in Whitford, and the jingling old fly from the "Blue Bell" inn was employed to carry her to such houses as she deigned to visit at. Her mother-in-law's lodging was not very frequently honoured by her presence. The stairs frightened her, she said; they were like a ladder. Mrs. Thimbleby's oblong drawing-room was a horrible little den. She had had no idea that ladies and gentlemen ever lived in such places. In truth, Castalia's anticipations of the Erringtons' domestic life at Whitford had by no means prepared her for the reality. Ancram had told her he was poor, certainly. Poor! Yes, but Jack Price was poor also. And Jack Price's valet was far better lodged than her mother-in-

law. However, occasionally the jingling fly did draw up before the widow Thimbleby's door, and Castalia was seen to alight from it with a discontented expression of countenance, and to pick her way with raised skirts over the cleanly sanded doorstep.

One day, when she entered the oblong drawing-room, Castalia perceived that Mrs. Errington was not there; but, instead of her, there was a young lady, sitting at work by the window, who lifted a lovely, blushing face as Castalia entered the room, and stammered out, in evident embarrassment, that Mrs. Errington would be there in a few minutes, and, meanwhile, would not the lady take a seat?

"I am Mrs. Ancram Errington," said Castalia, looking curiously at the girl.

"Yes; I know. I—I saw you at Dr. Bodkin's. I am spending the day with Mrs. Errington. She is very kind to me."

Algernon's wife seated herself in the easy-chair, and leisurely surveyed the young woman before her. Her first thought was, "How well she's dressed!" her second, "She seems very bashful and timid; quite afraid of me!" And this second thought was not displeasing to Mrs. Algernon; for, in general, she had not been treated by the "provincial bumpkins," as she called them,

with all the deference and submission due to her rank.

The girl's hands were nervously occupied with some needlework. The flush had faded from her face, and left it delicately pale, except a faint rose-tint in the cheeks. Her shining brown hair waved in soft curls on to her neck. Mrs. Algernon sat looking at her, and critically observing the becoming hue of her green silk gown, the taste and richness of a gold brooch at her throat, the whiteness of the shapely hand that was tremulously plying the needle. All at once a guess came into her mind, and she asked, suddenly:

"Is your name Maxfield?"

"Yes; Rhoda Maxfield," returned the girl, blushing more deeply and painfully than before.

"Why, I have heard of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Algernon. "You must come and see me."

Rhoda was so alarmed at the pitch of agitation to which she was brought by this speech, that she made a violent effort to control it, and answered with more calmness than she had hitherto displayed:

"Mrs. Errington has spoken once or twice of bringing me to your house; but—I did not like to intrude. And, besides——"

"Oh, Mrs. Errington brings all sorts of tire-

some people to see me; she may as well bring a nice person for once in a way."

Castalia was meaning to be very gracious.

"Yes; I mean—but then—my father might not like me to come and see you," blurted out Rhoda, with a sort of quiet desperation.

Mrs. Algernon opened her eyes very wide.

"Why, for goodness' sake? Oh, he had some quarrel or other with Mrs. Errington, hadn't he? Never mind, that must be all forgotten, or he wouldn't let you come here. I believe the truth is, that Mrs. Errington meant slyly to keep you to herself, and I shan't stand that."

Indeed, Castalia more than half believed this to be the case. And, partly from a sheer spirit of opposition to her mother-in-law—partly from the suspicious jealousy of her nature, that led her to do those things which she fancied others cunningly wished to prevent her from doing—she began to think she would patronise Rhoda and enlist her into her own faction. Besides, Rhoda was sweet-voiced, submissive, humble. Certainly, she would be a pleasanter sort of pet and tame animal to encourage about the house than Rose McDougall, who, with all her devotion, claimed a *quid pro quo* for her services, and dwelt on her kinship with the daughter of Lord Kauldkail, and talked of their "mutual ancestry" to

an extent that Castalia had begun to consider a bore.

At this moment Mrs. Errington bustled into the room, holding a small roll of yellow lace in her hand. "I have found it, Rhoda," she cried. "This little bit is nearly the same pattern as the trimming on the cap, and, if we join the frilling ——" Here she perceived Mrs. Algernon's presence, and stopped her speech with an exclamation of surprise: "Good gracious! is that you, Castalia? How long have you been here? This is an unexpected pleasure. Now you can give us your advice about the trimming of my cap, which Rhoda has undertaken for me."

Castalia did not rise from the easy-chair, but turned her cheek to receive the elder lady's kiss. Rhoda gathered up her work, and moved to go away.

"Don't run away, Rhoda!" cried Mrs. Errington. "We have no secrets to talk, have we, Castalia? You know my little friend Rhoda, do you not? She is a great pet of mine?"

"Oh, I will go and sit in your bedroom, if I may," muttered Rhoda, hurriedly. "I—I don't like to be in your way." And with a little confused courtesy to Mrs. Algernon, she slipped out of the room and closed the door behind her.

"She is such a shy little thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Errington.

"Well," returned Castalia, 'it is a comfort to meet with any Whitford person that knows her place! They are the most presumptuous set of creatures, in general, that I ever came across."

"Oh, Rhoda Maxfield's manners are never at fault, I assure you; I formed her myself, with considerable care and pains."

"She seems to make herself useful, too!" observed Castalia with a languid sneer.

"That she does, indeed, my dear! Most useful. Her taste and skill in any little matter of needlework are quite extraordinary. Poor child! she is so delighted to do anything for me. She is devotedly attached to me, and very grateful. Her father really did behave abominably, and she feels it very much, and wishes to make up for it. No doubt the old man repents of his folly and ill-humour now; but, of course, I can have nothing more to say to him. However, I willingly allow the girl to do any little thing she can. She has just been trimming this cap for me most exquisitely!"

Castalia thought, more and more, that it would be worth her while to patronise Rhoda.

"I shall go to old Maxfield myself, and get him to let her come to my house," said she, as

she took leave of her mother-in-law, and slowly made her way down Mrs. Thimbleby's ladder-like staircase, holding fast to the banisters with one hand, and not lifting one of her feet from a step until the other was firmly planted beside it.

On returning home that evening, Rhoda was greatly startled by her father's words, "Well, Miss Maxfield, here's a honourable missis been begging for the pleasure of your company!"

Rhoda turned pale and red, and said something in too low a tone to meet her father's ear.

"Oh yes," the old man went on; "the Honourable Mrs. Algernon Ancram Errington has been here, if you please! Well, I wish that young man joy of his bargain! Our little Sally is ten times as well-favoured. Your Aunt Betty saw her first; and, says she, 'Is Mr. Maxfield at home?'"

"I answered that your father was engaged in business," said Betty Grimshaw, taking up the narration.

"You should ha' said I was serving in the shop," observed old Max, doggedly, "and would sell her fine ladyship a penn'orth of gingerbread if she'd a mind, and could find the penny!"

"Nay, Jonathan, how could I have said that

to the lady? Says she, 'I wish to say a word to him.' So I showed her into your drawing-room, Rhoda, and called your father, and——"

"And there she sat," interrupted the old man, with unwonted eagerness in his face and his voice, "in a far better place than any she has of her own, if all accounts are true, looking about her as curious as a ferret. I walked in, in my calico sleeves and my apron——"

("He wouldn't take them off," put in Betty, parenthetically.)

"No; I wouldn't. And she told me she was come to ask my leave to have my daughter Rhoda at her house. 'Of course you'll let her come,' she says, 'for you let her go to Mrs. Errington's and to Mrs. Bodkin's?' 'Why, as to that,' says I, 'I'm rather partic'lar where Miss Maxfield visits.' You should have seen her stare. She looked fairly astounded."

"Oh, father!"

"Did I not speak the truth? I *am* partic'lar where you visit. I told her plainly that you was in a very different position from the rest of the family. 'I am a plain tradesman,' said I. 'I have my own place and my own influence, and I have been marvellously upholden in my walk of light. But my daughter Rhoda is a lady of the Lord's own making, and must be treated as

such. And she has plenty of this world's gear, for my endeavours have been abundantly blessed.'"

"Oh, father!"

"'Oh, father!'" repeated the old man, impatiently. "What did I say amiss? I tell you the woman was cowed by me. I am in subjection to none of their principalities and powers. The upshot was that I promised you should go and take tea with her to-morrow evening."

Rhoda was greatly surprised by this announcement, which was totally unexpected. "Oh, father!" she exclaimed in a trembling voice, "why did you say I should go?"

"Why? For various sufficient reasons. Let that be enough for you."

The truth was, that Castalia had more than hinted her suspicion that her mother-in-law selfishly endeavoured to keep Rhoda under her own influence, and to prevent her visiting elsewhere. And to thwart Mrs. Errington would alone have been a powerful incentive with old Max. But a far stronger motive with him was that he longed, with keen malice, that Algernon should be forced painfully to contrast the love he had been false to with the wife he had gained. He would have Algernon see Rhoda rich, and well-dressed, and courted. If Rhoda would but have flaunted her

prosperity in Algernon's face, there was scarcely any sum of money her father would have grudged for the pleasure of witnessing that spectacle. But, although it was hopeless to expect Rhoda to display any spirit of vengeance on her own behalf, yet she might be made the half-unconscious instrument of a retribution that should gall and mortify Algernon to the quick. That Rhoda herself might suffer in the process was an idea to which (if it occurred to him) he would give no harbourage.

Rhoda sat silent until her aunt had left the room to prepare the supper according to her habit. Then she rose, and, going close up to her father, took his hand, and looked imploringly into his face. "Father," she said, "don't make me go there. I —I can't bear it."

"You can't bear it!" burst out old Maxfield. He scowled with a frown of terrible malignity. But Rhoda well knew that his wrath was not directed against her. She stood trembling and pale before him, whilst he spoke more harsh and bitter words against all the family of the Erringtons than she had ever heard him utter on that score. He dropped, too, for the first time in her hearing, a hint that he had some power over Algernon, and would use it to his detriment. Rhoda mustered courage to ask him for an explana-

tion of those words. But he merely answered, "No matter. It is no matter. It is not the money. I shall not get it, nor do I greatly heed it. But I can put him to shame publicly, if I am so minded."

The poor child began to perceive that any display of wounded feeling on her part, of reluctance to meet Algernon and his wife, of being in any degree crushed and dispirited, would inflame her father's wrath against that family. And, although she had only the vaguest notions as to what he could or could not do to spite them, she had a hundred reasons for wishing to mitigate his animosity.

So, with the gentle cunning that belonged to her nature, at once timid and persistent, she began to unsay what she had said, and to try to efface the impression which her first refusal had made upon her father.

"I—I have been thinking that you are right, father, in saying it will be best for me to go to Ivy Lodge. You know Mrs. Errington has always been good to me, and it would please her, perhaps. And—and, after all, why should I be afraid of going there?"

"Afraid of going there!" echoed old Max, with sternly-set jaw and puckered brow. "Why, indeed, should you be afraid? There's some as

have reason to be afraid, but not my daughter—not Miss Maxfield. Afraid!"

"Perhaps people might think it strange if I did not go?"

"People! What people?"

"Well, no matter for that. But if you, father, think it well that I should go——"

"You shall go in a carriage from the 'Blue Bell' inn. And Sally shall accompany you and bring you back. And see that you are properly attired. I would have you wear your best garments. You shall not be shamed before that yellow-faced woman. I don't believe she has a better gown to her back than the one I bought you to wear at Dr. Bodkin's."

Rhoda waived the point for the moment; but, after a while, she was able to persuade her father that her grey merino gown, with a lace frill at her throat, was a more suitable garment in which to spend the evening at Ivy Lodge than the rich violet silk he recommended for the purpose. Real ladies, she urged timidly, did not wear their smartest clothes on such occasions. And old Max reluctantly accepted her dictum on this point. But nothing could shake him from his resolve that Rhoda should be conveyed to Mrs. Algernon Errington's door in a hired carriage. So, with a sigh, she yielded; devoutly wishing that a pelting

shower of rain, or even a thunderstorm, might arrive the next evening, to serve as an excuse for her appearing at Ivy Lodge in such unwonted state.

CHAPTER XII.

No Jupiter, rainy or thunderous, lent his assistance to account for the extraordinary phenomenon of Rhoda Maxfield's driving up to the garden-gate of Ivy Lodge instead of arriving there on foot. On the contrary, it was a fine autumn evening, with a serene sky where the sunset tints still lingered.

Rhoda alighted hurriedly from the carriage, and walked up the few feet of gravel path, between the garden fence and the house, with a beating heart. "You can go away now, Sally," she said, being very anxious to dismiss the "Blue Bell" equipage before the door should be opened. But Sally was not in such a hurry. Her master had told her that she was to wait and see Miss Rhoda safe into the house, and then she might come back in the carriage as far as the "Blue Bell." And Sally was not averse to have her new promotion to the dignity of "riding in a

coach" witnessed by Mrs. Algernon Errington's Polly, with whom she had a slight acquaintance. So Miss Maxfield's equipage was seen by the servant who opened the door, and stared at from the front parlour window by two pairs of eyes, belonging respectively to Miss Chubb and Mrs. Errington.

"You can go into the parlour, miss," said Polly. "Master and missis are still at dinner. But the old lady's in there and Miss Chubb."

That they should be still at dinner, at half-past six o'clock in the evening, seemed a strange circumstance to Rhoda, and was one that she had not reckoned on. But she supposed it was according to the customs of the high folks Mrs. Algernon had been used to live among. The innovation was not accepted so meekly by most of the Whitfordians, whom, indeed, it seemed to irritate in a greater degree than more serious offences. But it is true of most of us, that we are never more angry than when we are unable to explain the reasons for our anger.

"I am afraid I'm too early," said Rhoda, when she had entered the parlour and greeted her old friends, "but father said he thought it was the right time to come."

"Mr. and Mrs. Ancram Errington dine late, my dear. Castalia has not yet got broken of the habits of her own class, as I have had to be.

Indeed, she will probably never need to relinquish them. But it is no matter, Rhoda. You can make yourself comfortable here with us for half an hour or so. Miss Chubb called in to see me at my place, and I brought her down here with me. I knew Mrs. Ancram Errington would be happy to see her if she dropped in in an informal way."

"I never can get used to the name of Ancram instead of Algernon," said the spinster, raising her round red face from her woolwork. "It isn't half so pretty. Nine times out of ten I call your son 'Algy' plump and plain. I'm very sorry if it's improper, but I can't help it."

Mrs. Errington smiled with an air of lofty toleration. "Not at all improper," she said. "Algernon is the last creature in the world to be distant towards an old friend. But as to the name of Ancram, why it was, from the first, his appellation among the Seelys. And Castalia always calls him so. You see 'Ancram' was a familiar name in the circles she lived in; like Howard, or Seymour, or any of the great old family names, you know. It came naturally to her."

"Well, I should think that one's husband's Christian-name would come natural to one, even if it were only plain Tom, Dick, or Harry."

"He didn't begin by being her husband, my dear!"

Rhoda had nestled herself down in a corner behind a small table, and was turning over an album and one or two illustrated annuals. She hoped that the discussion as to Algernon's name would effectually divert the attention of the two elder ladies from the unprecedented fact that she had been brought to Ivy Lodge in a carriage. But she was not to be let off altogether. Miss Chubb, folding up her work, declared that it was growing too dark to distinguish the colours, and observed, "I was standing by the window to catch the last daylight, when you drove up, Rhoda. I couldn't think who it was arriving in such style."

"That was the 'Blue Bell' fly you were in, Rhoda," said Mrs. Errington. "I believe it to be the same vehicle that my daughter-in-law uses occasionally. She complains of it sadly. But I tell her she cannot expect to find her Aunt Seely's luxurious, well-hung carriages in a little provincial place like this."

Miss Chubb was about to make what she considered a severe retort, but she stifled it down. Mrs. Errington's airs were very provoking, to be sure; but there were reasons why Miss Chubb was more inclined to bear with her now than formerly. If it pleased this widowed mother to soften her disappointments about Algy's career and Algy's wife (it began to be considered in

Whitford that both would prove to be failures!) by an extra flourish or two, why should any one put her——"No!" said Miss Chubb to herself, as the question was half-framed in her mind, "that is not the right word, certainly. I defy the world to put Mrs. Errington out of conceit with herself! But why should one snub and snap at the poor woman?"

Indeed, Miss Chubb never snapped, and rarely attempted to snub. She had a fund of benevolence hidden under a heap of frothy vanities and absurdities, like the solid cake at the bottom of a trifle.

"Well," said she, smiling good-temperedly, "I'm sure Rhoda doesn't quarrel with the 'Blue Bell' fly, do you, Rhoda?"

"I shouldn't have wished to use it, myself, but father said, 'It is rather a long way,' and father thought——"

"Oh, my dear, there is no need to excuse yourself, or to look shy on the subject. We should all of us be glad enough of a coach to ride in, now and then, if we could afford it. I'm sure I should, and I don't mind saying so."

Mrs. Errington did not approve of the coach quite so unreservedly. She observed, with some solemnity, that she was no friend to extravagance; and that, above all things, persons ought to guard against ostentation, or a thrusting of themselves

into positions unsuited to that station in life to which it had pleased Providence to call them. And, in conclusion, she announced her intention of availing herself of the circumstance that Rhoda had a carriage at her disposal for the evening, to drive back with her as far as Mrs. Thimbleby's door—"which," said she, "is only a street and a half away from your house, Rhoda; and it will not make any difference to your father in point of expense."

Castalia found her three guests chatting in the twilight; or rather she found Mrs. Errington holding forth in her rich pleasant voice, whilst the others listened, and threw in a word or two now and then, just sufficient to show that they were attending to the good lady's harangue. In Rhoda's case, indeed, this appearance of attention was fallacious, for, although she said "Yes," and "No," and "Indeed!" at due intervals, her thoughts were wandering back to old days, which seemed suddenly to have receded into a far-distant past.

Castalia shook hands languidly with Miss Chubb and condescendingly with Rhoda. "I'm very glad you've come," she said to the latter, which was a speech of unusual warmth for her. And it had the merit, moreover, of being true. Castalia was not given to falsehood in her speech. She was too supercilious to care much what impression

she made on people in general; and if they bored her, she took no pains to conceal the fact. Weariness of spirit and discontent had begun to assail her once more. They were old enemies. Her marriage had banished them for a time; but they gathered again, like clouds which a transient gleam of wintry sunshine has temporarily dispersed, and shadowed her life with an increasing gloom. This young Rhoda Maxfield offered some chance of brightness and novelty. She was certainly different from the rest of the Whitford world, and the pursuit of her society had been beset with some little difficulties that gave it zest.

A lamp was brought into the room, and then Castalia sat down beside Rhoda, unceremoniously leaving the other ladies to entertain each other as best they might. She examined her guest's dress; the quality of the lace frill at her throat; the arrangement of her chestnut curls; the delicate little gold chain that shone upon the pearl-grey gown; the neatly-embroidered letters R. M. worked on a corner of the handkerchief that lay in her lap, with as much unreserve and coolness as though Rhoda had been some daintily-furred rabbit, or any other pet animal. On her part, Rhoda took cognisance of every detail in Castalia's appearance, attire, and manner; she marked every inflection of her voice, and every turn of her haughty, languid

head. And, perhaps, her scrutiny was the keener and more complete of the two, notwithstanding that it was made with timidly-veiled eyes and downcast head.

"What an odd man your father is!" said the Honourable Mrs. Ancram Errington, by way of opening the conversation.

Rhoda found it impossible to reply to this observation. She coloured, and twisted her gold chain round her fingers, and was silent. But it did not seem that Mrs. Ancram Errington expected, or wished for a reply. She went on with scarcely a pause: "I thought at first he would refuse to let you come here. But he gave his consent at last. I was quite amused with his odd way of doing it, though. He must be quite a 'character.' He's very rich, isn't he?"

"I don't know, ma'am," stammered Rhoda.

"Well, he says so himself; or, at least, he informed me that you were, or would be, which comes to the same thing. And don't call me 'ma'am.' It makes me feel a hundred years old. You and I must be great friends."

"Where is Algernon?" asked Mrs. Errington from the other side of the room.

"He will come presently, when he has finished his wine. Do you know we found that stuff from the 'Blue Bell,' that you recommended us to try, quite undrinkable! Ancram was obliged to get

Jack Price to send him down a case of claret, from his own wine-merchant in town."

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Mrs. Errington, and began to recapitulate all the occasions on which the wine supplied to her from the "Blue Bell" inn had been pronounced excellent by the first connoisseurs. But Castalia made small pretence of listening to or believing her statements. Indeed, I am sorry to say that obstinate incredulity was this young woman's habitual tone of mind with regard to almost every word that her mother-in-law uttered; whereby the Honourable Mrs. Castalia occasionally fell into mistakes.

"Could you not try Dr. Bodkin's wine-merchant?" suggested Miss Chubb. "I am no judge myself, but I feel sure that the doctor would not put bad wine on his table."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't suppose there is any first-rate wine to be got in this place. Ancram prefers dealing with the London man."

And then Castalia dismissed the subject with an expressive shrug. "Who are your chief friends here?" she asked of Rhoda, who had sat with her eyes fixed on a smart illustrated volume, scarcely seeing it, and feeling a confused sort of pain and mortification, at the tone in which the younger Mrs. Errington treated the elder.

"My chief friends?"

"Yes; you must know a great many people.

You have lived here all your life, have you not?"

"Yes; but—father never cared that I should make many acquaintances out of doors."

"You were Methodists, were you not? I remember Ancram telling me of the psalm-singing that used to go on downstairs. He can imitate it wonderfully. Do tell me about how you lived, and what you did! I never knew any Methodists, nor any people who kept a shop."

The naïve curiosity with which this was said might have moved some minds to mirth, and others to indignation. In Rhoda it produced only confusion and distress, and such an access of shyness as made her for a few moments literally dumb. She murmured at length some unintelligible sentences, of which "I'm sure I don't know" were the only words that Castalia could make out. She did not on this account desist from her inquiries, but threw them into the more particular form of a catechism, as, "Were you let to read anything except the Bible on Sundays?" "I suppose you never went to a ball in your life?" "How did you learn to do your own hair?" "Do the Methodist preachers really rant and shriek as much as people say?"

Algernon, coming quietly into the room, beheld his wife and Rhoda seated side by side on a sofa behind the little Pembroke table, and engaged,

apparently, in confidential conversation. They were so near together, and Castalia was bending down so low to hear Rhoda's faintly-uttered answers, as to give an air of intimacy to the group.

He lingered in the doorway looking at them, until Miss Chubb crying, "Oh, there you are, sir!" called the attention of the others to him, when he advanced and shook hands with Rhoda, whose fingers were icy cold as he touched them with his warm, white, exquisitely-cared-for hand. Then he bent to kiss his mother, and seated himself between her and his old friend Miss Chubb, in a low chair, stretching out his legs, and leaning back his head, as he contemplated the neatly-shod feet that were carelessly crossed in front of him.

"You did not expect to see Rhoda, did you, my dear boy?" said Mrs. Errington.

"Yes; I believe Castalia said something about having asked her. It is a new freak of Castalia's. I think she had better have left it alone. The old man is highly impracticable, and is just one of those persons whom it is prudent to keep at arm's length."

"I think so, too!" assented Mrs. Errington, emphatically. "Indeed, I almost wonder at his letting his daughter come here."

Algernon quite wondered at it. But he said nothing.

"Of course," pursued Mrs. Errington, "letting her come to me is a very different matter."

"Why?" asked Miss Chubb, bluntly.

"Because, my dear, the girl herself is so devotedly attached to me that I believe she would fret herself into an illness if she were forbidden to see me occasionally. And I believe old Maxfield is fond of his child, in his way, and would not wish to grieve her. But, of course, Rhoda can have no particular desire to visit Castalia. Indeed, I have offered to bring her more than once, and she has not availed herself of the opportunity."

"Old Max is ambitious for his daughter, they say," observed Miss Chubb, "and likes to get her into genteel company. Perhaps he thinks she will find a husband out of her own sphere. I'm told that old Max is quite rich, and that she will have all his money. But I think Rhoda is pretty enough to get well married, even without a fortune."

Then, when Mrs. Errington moved away to speak to her daughter-in-law, Miss Chubb whispered slily to Algernon, "You were a little bit smitten with our pretty Rhoda, once upon a time, sir, weren't you? Oh, it's no use your protesting and looking so unconscious! La, dear me; well, it was very natural! Calf-love, of course. But I'll tell you, between you and me, who is smitten with

her, and pretty seriously too—and that's Mr. Diamond!"

"Diamond!"

"Well, you needn't look so astonished. He's a young man, for all his grave ways, and she is a pretty girl. And, upon my word, I think it might do capitally."

"You look tired, Algernon," said Mrs. Errington to her son a little later in the evening. It must have been a very marked expression of fatigue which could have attracted the good lady's attention in any other human being.

"Oh, I've been bored and worried at that confounded post-office."

"What a shame!" cried Mrs. Errington. "Positively some representation ought to be made to Government about it."

"Oh, it's disgusting!" said Castalia, with a shrug of her lean shoulders, and in the fretful drawl, which conveyed the idea that she would be actively angry if any sublunary matters could be important enough to overcome her habitual languor.

"I don't remember hearing that Mr. Cooper found the work so hard," said Miss Chubb, innocently. Mr. Cooper had been the Whitford postmaster next before Algernon.

"It isn't the work, Miss Chubb," said Algernon, a little ashamed of the amount of sympathy

and compassion his words had evoked. "That is to say, it is not the quantity of the work, but the kind of it, that bores one. Cooper, I believe, was a steady, jog-trot old fellow, who did his daily task like a horse in a mill. But I can't take to it so comfortably. It is as if you, with your taste for elegant needlework, were set to hem dusters all day long!" Algernon laughed, in his old, frank way, as he made the comparison.

"Well, I shouldn't like that, certainly. But, after all, dusters are very useful things. And then, you see, I do the fancy work to amuse myself; but I should be paid for the dusters, and that makes a difference!"

"Paid!" screamed Castalia. "Why, you don't imagine that Ancram's twopenny salary can pay him! Good gracious, it seems to me scarcely enough to buy food with. It's quite horrible to think how poor we are!"

"Come," said Algernon, "I don't think this conversation is particularly lively or entertaining. Suppose we change the subject. There is Rho—Miss Maxfield looking as if she expected to see us all expire of inanition on the spot!"

And, in truth, Rhoda was gazing from one to the other with a pale, distressed face, and a look of surprise and compassion in her soft brown eyes.

Mrs. Errington did not approve of her daughter-

in-law's unscrupulous confession of poverty. Castalia lacked the Ancram gift of embellishing disadvantageous circumstances. And the elder lady took occasion to remark to Miss Chubb that everything was comparative; and that means which might appear ample to persons of inferior rank were very trivial and inadequate in the eyes of the Honourable Mrs. Ancram Errington. "She has been her uncle's pet for many years. My lord denied her nothing. And I needn't tell you, my dear Miss Chubb, that the emoluments of Algernon's official post are by no means the whole and sole income of our young couple here. There are private resources"—here Mrs. Errington waved her hands majestically, as though to indicate the ample nature of the resources—"which, to many persons, would seem positive affluence. But Castalia's measure is a high one. I scold her sometimes, I assure you. 'My dear child,' I say to her, 'look at me! Bred amidst the feudal splendours of Ancram Park, I have accommodated myself to very different scenes and very different associates;' for, of course, my dear soul, although I have a great regard for my Whitford friends, and am very sensible of their kind feelings for me, yet, as a mere matter of fact, it would be absurd to pretend that the society I now move in is equal, in point of rank, to that which surrounded my girlish years. And then Castalia's

perhaps partial estimate of her husband's talents (you know she has witnessed the impression they made in the most brilliant circles of the Metropolis) makes her impatient of his present position. For myself, feeling sure, as I do, that this post-office business is merely temporary, I can look at matters with more philosophy."

"Ouf!" panted Miss Chubb, and began to fan herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Anything the matter, Miss Chubb?" asked Algernon, raising his eyebrows and looking at her with a smile.

"Nothing particular, Algy. I find it a little oppressive, that's all."

"This little room is so stuffy with more than two or three people in it!" said Castalia.

"I'll do my part towards making it less stuffy," said Miss Chubb, jumping up, and beginning to shake hands all round. "I daresay my old Martha is there. I told her to come for me at nine o'clock. Oh, never mind, thank you," in answer to Castalia's suggestion that she should stay and have a cup of coffee, which would be brought in presently. "Never mind the coffee. I have no doubt I shall find a bit of supper ready at home." And with that she departed.

"I hope it wasn't too severe, that hit about the supper," said the good little woman to herself as she trotted homeward, accompanied by the faith-

ful Martha. "But really—offering one a cup of coffee at nine o'clock at night! And as to Mrs. Errington, I am sorry for her, and can make allowances for her: but she did so go beyond all bounds to-night that, if I had not come away when I did, I think I should have choked."

"Is the little woman affronted at anything?" asked Algernon of his wife, when Miss Chubb's footsteps had ceased to be heard pattering down the gravel path outside the house.

"Eh? What little woman? Oh, the Chubb? No; I don't know. I suppose not."

"No, no; not at all," said Mrs. Errington, decisively. "But you know her ways of old. She has no *savoir faire*. A good little creature, poor soul! Oh, by-the-way, Castalia, you know the patterns for autumn mantles you asked me to look at? Well, I went into Ravell and Sarsnet's yesterday, and they told me——" And then the worthy matron and her daughter-in-law entered into an earnest discussion in an undertone; the common interest in autumn mantles supplying that "touch of nature" which made them kin more effectually than the matrimonial alliance that united their families.

"I'm afraid you must have had a very dull evening," said the master of the house, looking down on Rhoda as he stood near her, leaning with his back against the tiny mantelshelf.

"No, thank you."

"I'm afraid you must! There was no amusement for you at all."

"My evenings are not generally very amusing. I daresay you, who have been accustomed to such different things, would find them very dull."

This was not the humble, simple, childlike Rhoda whom he had parted from two years ago. It was not that she had now no humility or simplicity, but the humility was mingled with dignity, the simplicity with an easier grace. Rhoda was more self-possessed at this moment than she had been all the evening before. The weakest creatures are not without some means of self-defence; and, if she be but pure-hearted, the most inexperienced girl in the world can put on an armour of maiden pride over her hurt feelings that has been known to puzzle even very intelligent individuals of the opposite sex; and has perhaps given rise to one or two of the numerous impassioned complaints that have been uttered from time to time as to the inscrutable duplicity of women. In like manner if a man scalds his finger, or gets a bullet in his flesh, he endeavours to bear the pain without screaming.

So little Rhoda Maxfield sat there with a placid face, talking to her old love, turning over the leaves of a picture-book, and scarcely looking at him as she talked.

Now, if Algernon had been consulted beforehand as to what line of conduct he would wish Rhoda to adopt when they should meet, he would, doubtless, have said, "Let us meet pleasantly and frankly as old friends, and behave as if all our old love-making had been the mere amusement of our childhood!" And yet, somehow, it a little disconcerted him to see her so calm.

"You—don't you—don't you go out much in the evening?" he said, feeling (to his own surprise) considerably at a loss what to say.

"Go out much in the evening? No, indeed; where should I go to?" Rhoda actually gave a little laugh as she answered him.

"Oh, I thought my mother mentioned that you were a good deal at the Bodkins."

"Yes; I go to see Miss Minnie sometimes. They are all very good to me."

"And my mother says, too, that you are growing quite a blue-stocking! You have lessons in French, and music, and I don't know what besides."

"Father can afford to have me taught now, and so I have begun to learn a few of the things that girls are taught when they are little children, if they happen to be the children of gentlefolks," answered Rhoda, with considerable spirit.

"I'm sure there is no reason why you should not learn them."

"I hope not. But, of course, I am clumsy, and shall never succeed so well as if I had begun earlier. I am getting very old, you know!"

"Oh, very old, indeed! Your birthday, I remember, falls——" he checked himself with a sudden recollection of the last birthday he had spent with Rhoda, and of the bunch of late roses he had been at the pains to procure for her on that occasion from the gardener at Pudcombe Hall. And, on the whole, he felt positively relieved when Slater came to announce, with her chronic air of resentful gentility, that "Miss Maxfield's young woman was waiting for her in the hall."

"And are you off too, mother?" he asked.

"Yes, my dear Algernon. I am going to drive home with Rhoda."

"Drive! Oh, so you are indulging in the extravagance of a fly, madam! I am glad of it, though you did give me a lecture on the subject of economy only last week!"

"You know that I always do, and always did, disapprove of extravagance, Algernon. A genteel economy is compatible with the highest breeding. But—the fact is, that Rhoda has a coach to go home in, and I'm about to take advantage of it."

There was something in the situation which Algernon felt to be embarrassing, as he gave his

arm to his mother to lead her to the carriage. But Mrs. Errington had at least one quality of a great lady—she was not easily disconcerted. She marched majestically down the garden path, entered the vehicle which old Max's money was to pay for, with an air of proprietorship, and invited Rhoda to take her place beside her with a most condescending wave of the hand.

"You must come again soon," Castalia had said to her new acquaintance when they bade each other "Good night."

But Algernon did not support his wife's invitation by a single word, though he smiled very persistently as he stood bare-headed in the moonlight, watching his mother and Rhoda drive away.

CHAPTER XIII.

The accounts which had reached Whitford from Wales, of the wonderful effects produced by David Powell's preaching there, sufficed to cause a good deal of excitement among the lower classes in the little town, when it was reported that Powell would revisit it, and would preach on Whit Meadow, and also in the room used by the "Ranters," in Lady Lane.

The Wesleyan Methodists in Whitford now felt themselves at liberty to allow their smouldering animosity against Powell to break forth openly, for he had seceded from the Society. Some said he had been expelled from it, but this was not true, although there was little doubt that, at the next Conference, his conduct and doctrine would have been severely reprehended; and, probably, he would have been required publicly to recant them on pain of expulsion. Should this be the case, those who knew David Powell had little

difficulty in prophesying the issue. However, all speculations as to his probable behaviour under the reproof of Conference were rendered vain by the preacher's voluntarily withdrawing himself from the "bonds of the Society," as he phrased it.

Then broke forth the hostile sentiments of the Whitford Wesleyans against this rash and innovating preacher. Unfavourable opinions of him, which had been concealed, or only dimly expressed, were now declared openly. He was an Antinomian; he had fallen away from the doctrines of Assurance and Christian Perfection; he had brought scandal on large bodies of sober, serious persons, by encouraging wild and extravagant manifestations among his hearers; his exhortations were calculated to do harm, inasmuch as he preached a doctrine of asceticism and self-renunciation, which, if followed, would have the most inconvenient consequences. That some of these accusations—as, for example, that of Antinomianism, and that of too extreme self-mortification—were somewhat incompatible with each other, was no impediment to their being heaped simultaneously on David Powell. The strongest disapprobation of his sayings and doings was expressed by that select body of citizens who attended at the little Wesleyan chapel. And yet there was, perhaps, less bitterness in this open opposition to

him than had been felt towards him during the last days of his ministration in Whitford. So long as David Powell was their preacher, approved —or, at least, not disapproved—by Conference, a struggle went on in some minds to reconcile his teaching with their practice, which was an irritating and unsatisfactory state of things, since the struggle in most cases was not so much to modify their practice, in order to bring it into harmony with his precepts, as ingeniously to interpret his precepts so that they should not too flagrantly accuse their practice. But now that it was competent to the stanchest Methodist to reject Powell's authority altogether, these unprofitable efforts ceased, and with them a good deal of resentment.

The chorus of openly-expressed hostility to the preacher, which, I have said, made itself heard in Whitford, arose, in a great measure, from the common delight in declaring, where some circumstances unforeseen by the world in general comes to pass, that we perceived all along how matters would go, and knew our neighbour to be a very different fellow from what you took him to be.

Here old Max was triumphant; and, it must be owned, with more reason than many of his acquaintances. He had openly quarrelled with this fanatical Welshman, long before the main body of

the Whitford Wesleyans had ventured to repudiate him.

One humble friend was faithful to the preacher. The widow Thimbleby maintained, in the teeth of all opposition, that, though Mr. Powell might be a little mistaken here and there on points of doctrine—she was an ignorant woman, and couldn't judge of these things—yet his practice came very near perfection; and that the only human being to whom he ever showed severity, intolerance, and lack of love was himself. Mrs. Thimbleby was not strong in controversy. It was not difficult to push her to her last resort—namely, crying silently behind her apron. But there was some tough fibre of loyalty in the meek creature which made it impossible for her to belie her conscience by deserting David Powell. The cold attic at the top of her little house was prepared for his reception as soon as it was known that he was about to revisit Whitford; and Mrs. Thimbleby went to the loft over the corn-dealer's store-house in Lady Lane one Sunday evening to beg that Nick Green would let Mr. Powell know, whenever he should arrive, that his old quarters were waiting for him, and that she would take it as a personal unkindness if he did not consent to occupy them. She could not help talking of the preacher to her grand lodger Mrs. Errington, of whom she was considerably in awe. The poor woman's heart

was full at the thought of seeing him again. And not even Mrs. Errington's lofty severity regarding all dissenters and "ignorant persons who flew in the face of Providence and attempted to teach their betters," could entirely stifle her expressions of anxiety as to Mr. Powell's health, her hopes that he took a little more care of himself than he formerly did, and her anecdotes of his angelic charity and goodness towards the poor, and needy, and suffering.

"I should advise you on no account to go and hear this man preach," said Mrs. Errington to her landlady. "Terrible scenes have taken place in Wales; and very likely something of the kind may happen here. You are very weak, my poor soul. You have no force of character. You would be sure to catch any excitement that was going. And how should you like, pray, to be brought home from Lady Lane on a stretcher?"

But even this alarming suggestion did not deter Mrs. Thimbleby from haunting the "Ranters'" meeting-room, and leaving message after message with Nick Green to be sure and tell Mr. Powell to come up to her house, the very minute he arrived. Nick Green knew no more than the widow the day and hour of the preacher's arrival. All he could say was, that Powell had applied to him and to his co-religionists for leave to preach in the room—little more than a loft—which they

rented of the corn-dealer in Lady Lane. Powell had been refused permission to speak in the Wesleyan chapel to which his eloquence had formerly attracted such crowds of listeners. Whit Meadow would, indeed, be probably open to him; but the year was drawing on apace, autumn would soon give place to winter, and, at all events in the evening, it would be vain to hope for a large number of listeners in the open air.

"Open air!" echoed Mrs. Thimbleby, raising her hands and eyes; "why, Mr. Green, he ought never to think of preaching in the open air at this season, and him so delicate!"

"Nay, sister Thimbleby," responded Nick Green, a powerful, black-muzzled fellow with a pair of lungs like a blacksmith's bellows, "we may not put our hand to the plough and turn back. We are all of us called upon to give ourselves body and soul in the Lord's service. And many's the night, after my day's work was over, that I've exhorted here in this very room and poured out the Word for two and three hours at a stretch, until the sweat ran down my face like water, and the brethren were fairly worn out. But yet I have been marvellously strengthened. I doubt not that Brother Powell will be so too, especially now that he has given up dead words, and the errors of the Society, and thrown off the yoke of the law."

"Dear, I hope so," answered Mrs. Thimbleby, tremulously; "but I do wish he would try a hot posset of a night, just before going to bed."

The good woman was beginning to walk away up Lady Lane, somewhat disconsolately, for she reflected that if Nick Green measured Mr. Powell's strength by his own, he would surely not spare it, and that the preacher needed rather a curb than a spur to his self-forgetting exertions, when she almost ran against a man who was coming in the opposite direction. They were not twenty paces from the door of the corn-dealer's store-house, and a lamp that burnt above it shed sufficient light for her to recognise the face of the very person who was in her thoughts.

"Mr. Powell!" she exclaimed in a joyful tone. "Thanks be to the Lord that I have met you! Was you going to look for Mr. Green? He is just putting the lights out and coming away. I left a message with him for you, sir; but now I can give it you myself. You will come up with me to my house, now, won't you? Everything is ready, and has been these three days. You wouldn't think of going anywhere else in Whitford but to my house, would you, Mr. Powell?"

She ran on thus eagerly, because she saw, or fancied she saw, symptoms of opposition to her plan in Powell's face. He hesitated. "My good friend," said he, "your Christian kindness is

very precious to me, but I am not clear that I should do right in becoming an inmate of your house."

"Oh, but I am, Mr. Powell, quite clear! Why it would be a real unkindness to refuse me."

"It is not a matter to be settled thus lightly," answered Powell, although at the same time he turned and walked a few paces by the widow's side. "I had thought that I might sleep for to-night at least in our friends' meeting-room."

"What! in the loft there? Lord ha' mercy, Mr. Powell! 'Tis cold and draughty, and there's nothing in it but a few wooden benches, and the rats run about as bold as can be, directly the lights is put out. Why 't would be a tempting' of Providence, Mr. Powell."

"I am not dainty about my accommodation, as you know; and I could sleep there without payment."

"Without payment! Why, you might pay pretty dear for it in health, if not in money. And, for that matter, I shouldn't think of asking a penny of rent for my attic, as long as ever you choose to stay in it." Then, with an instinctive knowledge of the sort of plea that might be likely to prevail with him, she added, "As for being dainty about your accommodation, why I know you never were so, and I hope you haven't altered, for, indeed, the

attic is sadly uncomfortable. I think there's worse draughts from the window than ever. And it would be a benefit to me to get the room aired and occkypied; for only last week I had a most respectable young man, a journeyman painter, to look at it, and he say, 'Mrs. Thimbleby, we shan't disagree about the rent,' he say; 'but I do wish the room had been slept in latterly; for I've a fear as it's damp,' he say, 'and that that's the reason you don't use it yourself, nor haven't let it.' But I tell him the only reason why I didn't use the room was as you might be expected back any day, and I couldn't let you find your place taken. And he say if he could be satisfied of that, he may take it after next month, when you would likely be gone again. So you see as you would be doing me a service, Mr. Powell, not to say a pleasure."

Whether David Powell implicitly believed the good creature's argument to be derived from fact, may be doubtful; but he suffered himself to be persuaded to accompany her to his old lodgings; and they begged Nick Green, who presently overtook them, to send one of his lads to the coach-office, to bring to Mrs. Thimbleby's the small battered valise which constituted all Powell's luggage.

"I would have gone to fetch it myself," said

the preacher, apologetically, "but, in truth, I am so exceedingly weary, that I doubt whether my strength would avail to carry even that slender burden the distance from the coach-office to your house."

When he was seated beside Mrs. Thimbleby's clean kitchen hearth, on which burned a fire of unwontedly generous proportions—the widow declared that, as she grew older, she found it necessary to her health to have a glow of warmth in her kitchen these chilly autumn nights—when the preacher was thus seated, I say, and when the red and yellow firelight illuminated his face fully, it was very evident that he was indeed "exceeding weary;" weary, and worn, and wan, with hollow temples, eyes that blazed feverishly, and a hue of startling pallor overspreading his whole countenance. For a few minutes, whilst his good hostess moved about hither and thither in the little kitchen, preparing some tea, and slicing some bacon, to be presently fried for his refection, Powell sat looking straight before him, with a curious expression in his widely-opened eyes, something like that of a sleep-walker. They were evidently seeing nothing of the physical realities around them, and yet they unmistakably expressed the attentive recognition by the mind of some image painted on their wondrous spheres. The true round mirror of the

wizard is that magic ball of sight; for on its sensitive surface live and move a thousand airy phantoms, besides the reflection of all that peoples this tangible earth we dwell on. Powell's lips began to move rapidly, although no sound came from them. He seemed to be addressing a creature visible to him alone, on which his straining gaze was fixed. But suddenly his face changed, and was troubled as a still pool is troubled by a ripple that breaks its clearly glazed reflection into fantastic fragments. In another moment he passed his thin hand several times with a strong pressure over his brows, shut and opened his eyes like a dreamer awakened, drew his pocket Bible from his breast, and began to read with an air of resolute attention.

"Will you ask a blessing, Mr. Powell?" said the widow timidly.

He looked up. A comfortable meal was spread on the white deal table before him. Mrs. Thimbleby sat opposite to him in her old chair with the patch-work cushions; the fire shone; the household cat purred drowsily; the old clock clicked off the moments as they flowed past—tick tack, tick tack. Then there came a jar, a burr of wheels and springs, and the tinkle of silver-toned metal striking nine. In a few moments the ancient belfry of St. Chad's began to send forth its mellow chimes. Far and wide they sounded—over the town and the flat-

meadow country—through the darkness. Powell sat still and silent, listening to the bells until they had done chiming.

"How well I know those voices!" he said. "I used to lie awake and listen to them here, in the old attic, when my soul was wrestling with a mighty temptation; when my heart was smitten and withered like grass, so that I forgot to eat my bread. The sound of them is sweet to the fleshly ears of the body; but to the ears of the spirit they can say marvellous things. They have been the instruments to bring me many a message of counsel as they came singing and buzzing in my brain."

The widow Thimbleby sat looking at the preacher, as he spoke, with an expression of puzzled admiration, blended with anxiety.

"Oh, for certain the Lord has set a sign on you!" she exclaimed. "He would have us to know that you are a chosen vessel, and He has given you the gifts of the spirit in marvellous abundance. But, dear Mr. Powell, I doubt He does not mean you to neglect the fleshly tabernacle neither; for, as I say to myself, He could ha' made us all soul and no body, if such had been His blessed will."

"We thank Thee, O Father, most merciful. Amen!" said Powell, bending over the table.

"Amen!" repeated Mrs. Thimbleby. "And now pray do fall to, and eat something, for I'm sure you need it."

"It is strange; but, though I have fasted since five o'clock this morning, I feel no hunger."

"Mercy me! fasting since five o'clock this morning? Why, for sure, that's the very reason you can't eat! Your stomach is too weak. Dear, dear, dear; but you must make an effort to swallow something, sir. Drink a sup of tea."

Powell complied with her entreaty, although he expressed some misgiving as to the righteousness of his partaking of so luxurious a beverage. And then he ate a few mouthfuls of food, but evidently without appetite. But seeing his good friend's uneasiness on his behalf, he said, with the rare smile which so brightened his countenance:

"Do not be so concerned for me. There is no need. Although I have not much replenished the carnal man to-day, yet have I been abundantly refreshed and comforted. I tarried in a small town on the borders of this county at midday, and I found that my ministrations there in the spring season had borne fruit. Many who had been reclaimed from evil courses came about me, and we gave thanks with much uplifting of the heart. And, although I had suffered somewhat from faintness before arriving at that place, yet, no sooner

were these chosen persons got about me, and I began to pray and praise, than I felt stronger and more able for exertion than I have many a time felt after a long night's rest and an abundant meal."

Poor Mrs. Thimbleby's mind was divided and "exercised," as she herself would have said, between her reverent faith in Powell's being supported by the supernal powers and her rooted conviction regarding the virtues of a hot posset. Was it for her, a poor, ignorant woman, presumptuously to supplement, as it were, the protection of Providence, and to insist on the saintly preacher's drinking her posset? Yet, on the other hand, arose her own powerful argument, that the Lord might have dispensed with our bodies altogether had it so pleased him; and that therefore, mankind being provided with those appendages, it was but reasonable to conclude they were meant to be taken some care of. At length the widow's mental debatings resulted in a resolution to make the hot posset, and carry it up to the preacher's bedside without consulting him on the subject—"For," said she to herself, "if I persuade him to swallow it out of kindness to me, there'll be no sin in the matter. Or, at least, if there is, it will be my sin, and not his; and that is not of so much consequence."

In this spirit of true feminine devotion she acted, and having coaxed Powell to swallow the cordial mixture—as a mother might coax a sick child—she had the satisfaction of seeing him fall into a deep slumber, he being, in truth, exhausted by fatigue, excitement, and lack of nourishment.

CHAPTER XIV.

Among the first persons to hear of David Powell's return to Whitford, and his intention of preaching there, was Miss Bodkin. As the spectators see more of the play than the actors, so Minnie, from her couch or her lounging-chair, witnessed many a scene in its entirety, which those who performed it were only conscious of in a fragmentary manner. The news of the little town was brought to her through many various channels. Her infirmity seemed to set her in a place apart, and many a one was willing to play the part of Chorus for her behoof, and interpret the drama after his or her own fashion.

Minnie's maid, Jane Gibbs; Mrs. Errington; and Mr. Diamond, had all given her the news about Mr. Powell; and all in different keys, and with such variations of detail as universally attend contemporaneous *vivâ voce* transmissions.

Jane Gibbs had a strong feeling of respect

and gratitude towards the preacher for his having "converted" her brother. And, being herself a member of the Church of England, she looked upon his secession from the main body of the Methodists with great leniency. She dared to say that Mr. Powell would do as much good in Lady Lane as he had done in the Wesleyan Chapel. And seeing that whether you called 'em Wesleyans, or Ranters, or Baptists, or Quakers, or Calvinists, they were all Dissenters, it could not so much matter whether they disagreed among each other or not.

Mrs. Errington, without entering into that question, considered herself peculiarly aggrieved by the circumstance that Powell had come to lodge in the same house with her. "I am doomed, it seems, to be a victim to that man!" said she to Minnie Bodkin. "At Maxfield's house I was frequently disturbed by his hymns and his preachments; and even now, it appears, I am not to escape from him. He absorbs Mrs. Thimbleby's attention to a ludicrous extent. If you will credit the fact, my dear Minnie, only yesterday morning my egg was sent up at breakfast greatly overboiled; and when I remonstrated with Mrs. Thimbleby on this piece of negligence, what excuse do you suppose she made? She answered that she was very sorry, but she had been getting ready a 'little snack'—that was her expression

—for Mr. Powell after his early preaching, and it had slipped her memory that my breakfast-egg was still in the saucepan! I have no doubt the man stuffs and crams himself at her cost. All these dissenting preachers do, my dear."

Whereunto Minnie answered gravely, that it was a great comfort to Church people to reflect that moderation in eating and drinking was entirely confined to the orthodox clergy.

Mr. Diamond, again, took a different and more sympathising view of the poor preacher. But even he was very far from entertaining the same exalted admiration for Powell's character as was felt by Minnie. Matthew Diamond had an Englishman's ingrained antipathy to the uncontrolled display of feeling, from which Powell's Welsh blood by no means revolted. Diamond could never divest himself of a lurking notion that no man would publicly exhibit deep emotion if he could help it; and consequently he looked on all such exhibitions as rather pitiable manifestations of infirmity, or else as mere clap-trap and play-acting. Of the latter it was impossible to suspect Powell. Diamond had the touchstone of truthfulness within himself; and it sufficed to convince him that the preacher, however wild and mistaken, was sincere. "Yes," he said to Miss Bodkin, "there can be no doubt that the man's soul is as clear from guile as an infant's. But it is a pity he cannot suppress the

outbursts of enthusiasm which exhaust him so much."

"He does not wish to suppress them," answered Minnie. "He looks on them as a means specially vouchsafed to him for moving others, and—to use his own words—saving souls. Some sober, sensible persons remind me, when they speak of David Powell, of a covey of barn-door fowls, complacently staring up at a lark, and exclaiming, 'Poor creature, how unpleasant it must be for it to have to soar and gyrate in that giddy fashion; and making that shrill noise all the time, too! How it must envy us our constitutions!'"

"I suppose I am one of the barn-door fowls, Miss Bodkin?"

"Well—perhaps! Or, rather, you have lived among them until it seems to you that higher-flying creatures have something a little ridiculous about them. And you forcibly restrain any upward tendencies of wing—at least in the presence of your mates of the barn-door."

"I am flattered to be credited with some upward tendencies, at any rate! But, Miss Bodkin, to drop metaphor, in which I cannot attempt to compete with you, I must be allowed to maintain that Powell's outbursts of excitement are neither good for himself nor others. They are morbid, and not the healthy expression of a healthy nature, like the lark's singing and soaring."

"You have seen Powell since his return. How does he seem to be in health?"

"In bodily health not, perhaps, so much amiss, although he is greatly emaciated and startlingly pale. But his mind is in a strange state."

"He was always enthusiastic."

"He is enthusiastic for others, but as regards himself his mind is a prey to overwhelming gloom. I see a great change for the worse in him in that respect."

Minnie felt a strong desire to see the preacher again. She compassionated him from her heart, and thought she might be able to administer some comfort to him, as regarded Rhoda Maxfield. There were days when Minnie was able to walk from one room to another with the assistance of a crutched stick; and it occurred to her that if Mrs. Thimbleby would allow her house to be made the place of meeting, she might see and speak with Powell there more privately, and with less danger of exciting gossiping remark, than elsewhere. Minnie had once or twice latterly driven to the widow Thimbleby's house to see Mrs. Errington, or leave a message for her, although she had never mounted to her sitting-room. For the ladder-like staircase, which was an imaginary difficulty in the way of Castalia's visits to her mother-in-law, was a very real obstacle to Minnie Bodkin.

The project of seeing Powell in this way took

possession of her mind. She sent a note to Mrs. Thimbleby, by her maid Jane, asking at what hour Mr. Powell was most likely to be in the house; and saying that she should like to come there and say a few words to him about a person in whose welfare he was interested.

The widow saw nothing very singular in this. She knew that Powell had been to see Miss Bodkin before he left Whitford. And it was quite in accordance with the known characters of the Methodist preacher and the rector's daughter that they should meet and combine on the common ground of charity. "For sure Mr. Powell have recommended some poor afflicted person to the young lady, and she have assisted 'em, whosoever they may be!" thought Mrs. Thimbleby. "And she begs me not to mention her coming to anybody. For sure and certain she's not one o' them as boasts of their good deeds. No, no; like our blessed Mr. Powell, she don't let her left hand know what her right hand doeth. I wonder if she's under conviction! Such a good, charitable lady, it seems as if she must belong to the elect. But, there, all our good works are filthy rags, I s'pose, the best on us. But I can't help thinking as Miss Bodkin's works must be more pleasing to the Lord than Brother Jackson's, as lives among the Wesleyans on the fat of the land, and don't do much in return, except condemning all those

folks as isn't Wesleyans. Lord forgive me if I'm wrong!"

Mrs. Thimbleby returned a verbal message to Miss Bodkin, as the latter had desired her to do: Mrs. Thimbleby's duty, and the most likely time would be between four and five o'clock in the afternoon; and she would be sure to obey Miss Bodkin's instructions. "And I'm ever so much obliged to her for excusing me writing, my dear," said the widow to Jane; "for my hands is so stiff and rough with hard work, as holding a pen seems to be a great difficulty. I'd far rather mop out my back yard any day than write the receipt for the lodgers' rent. And 'tis but a smudgy business when all's done."

On the following day Dr. Bodkin's sober green carriage, drawn by a stout, sober-paced horse, was seen standing at Mrs. Thimbleby's door. It was a few minutes after four o'clock in the afternoon. The street was very quiet. There was scarcely a passer-by to be seen from one end of it to the other, when Jane and the old man-servant assisted Miss Bodkin to alight from the carriage, and supported her into the clean, flagged room on the ground floor, which served Mrs. Thimbleby for parlour, kitchen, and dining-hall, all in one. The coachman had orders to return and fetch his young mistress at six o'clock. "Will you give me house-room so long, Mrs. Thimbleby?" asked

Minnie with a sweet smile, which so captivated the good woman that she stood staring at her visitor in a kind of rapture, unable to reply for a minute or two.

Minnie was placed in Mrs. Thimbleby's own high-backed chair, with the clean patchwork-covered cushions piled behind her. A horsehair footstool, borrowed for the purpose from Mr. Diamond's parlour, was under her feet. And she declared that she found herself as comfortable as in her own lounging-chair at home.

"You see, miss, I couldn't say to the minute when Mr. Powell would be back, but between four and five he generally do come in, and I make him swallow a cup of herb tea, or something. And I will not deny that I sometimes puts a pinch of China tea in. But he don't know. This is but a poor place, miss," added the widow, glancing round, "but so long as you can make yourself content to stay in it, so long you will be welcome as the flowers in May, if 'twas to be for a twelvemonth?"

Then Minnie praised the brilliant cleanliness of the little kitchen, took notice of the cat that rubbed its velvet head confidingly against her hand, and asked Mrs. Thimbleby how she prospered in her lodging-letting.

The widow was loquacious in her mild slow way; and she was pleased at this opportunity for

a little harmless gossip. It was a propensity which received frequent checks from those around her. Mr. Diamond was too taciturn, too grave, too much absorbed in his books, to give any heed to his landlady's conversation, beyond listening to the few particulars of his weekly expenses, which she insisted on explaining to him. Mrs. Errington, on the other hand, was not at all taciturn, but she desired to have the talk chiefly to herself. She loved to harangue Mrs. Thimbleby on a variety of subjects, and to place, in vivid colours before her, the inadequacy of all her domestic arrangements to satisfy a lady of Mrs. Errington's quality. As to gossiping with David Powell, Mrs. Thimbleby would as soon have thought of attempting to gossip with the sculptured figure of a saint, which stood in a niche at one side of the portal of St. Chad's! So the good woman, finding Miss Bodkin more compliant and affable than the two first-named of her lodgers, and nearer to the level of common humanity than the last, indulged herself with an outpouring of chat, as the two sat waiting for Powell's return.

Minnie listened to her at first with but a drowsy kind of attention. Her own thoughts were wandering away from the present time and place. And, for a while, the quiet of the room, where the gathering twilight seemed to bring a deeper hush, was only broken by the monotonous murmur

of the widow's voice. But by-and-by Mrs. Thimbleby spoke words which effectually aroused Minnie's attention.

There was, she said, a deal of talk in Whitford about young Mr. Errington. He was such a very nice-spoken gentleman, and most people seemed to like him so much! But yet he had enemies in the town. Folks said he was extravagant. And his wife gave herself such airs as there was no bearing with 'em; she not paying ready money, but almost expecting tradespeople to be satisfied with the honour of serving her. Poor lady, she wasn't used to be pinched for money herself, and knew no better, most likely! But many Whitford shopkeepers grumbled as Mr. Errington got goods on credit from them, and yet sent orders to London with ready money for expensive articles, and it didn't seem fair. There was no use saying anything to old Mrs. Errington about the matter, because, though she was, no doubt, a very good-hearted lady, she was rather "high." And if you mentioned to her, as Mr. Gladwish, the shoemaker, said, unpleasant things about her son's bill, why she would tell you that her grandfather drove four horses to his coach, and that Mr. Algernon's wife's uncle was a great nobleman up in London, as paid his butler a bigger salary than all Gladwish could earn in a year. And if such sayings got abroad, they would not be soothing to the feelings of a

respectable shoemaker, would they now? Not to say that they wouldn't help to pay Gladwish's bill; nor yet the fly bill at the "Blue Bell;" nor yet the bill for young madam at Ravell and Sarsnet's; nor yet the bill at the fishmonger and poulterer's; as she (Mrs. Thimbleby) was credibly informed that Ivy Lodge consumed the best of everything, and at a great rate. In the beginning, tradespeople believed all that was said about young Mr. and Mrs. Errington's fine friends and fine prospects, and seemed inclined to trust 'em to any amount. But latterly there had growed up a feeling against 'em. And—if Miss Bodkin wouldn't think it a liberty in her to ask her not to mention it again, seeing it was but a guess on her part—she would go so far as to say that she believed an enemy was at work, and that enemy old Jonathan Maxfield. Why or wherefore old Max should be so set against young Mr. Algernon, as he had known him from a little child, she could not say. But there was rumours about that young Errington owed old Max money. And old Max was that near and fond of his pelf, as nothing was so likely to make him mad against any one as losing money by 'em; and old Max was a harsh man and a bitter where he took a dislike. Only see how he had persecuted Mr. Powell! And though he let his daughter go to Ivy Lodge—and they did say young Mrs. Errington had taken quite

a fancy to the girl—yet that didn't prevent old Max sneering and snarling, and saying all manner of sharp words against the Erringtons. And old Max was a man of substance, and his words had weight in the town. "And you see, miss," said Mrs. Thimbleby, in conclusion, "young Mr. and Mrs. Errington are gentlefolks, and they don't hear what's said in Whitford, and they may think things are all right when they're all wrong. Of course, I daresay they have great friends and good prospects, miss. And very likely they could settle everything to-morrow if they thought fit. Only the tale here is, that not a tradesman in the place has seen the colour of their money, and they deny theirselves nothing, and the lady so high in her manners, and altogether there is a feeling against 'em', miss. And as I know you're a old friend, and a kind friend, I'm sure, and not one as takes pleasure in the troubles of their neighbours, I thought I would mention it to you, in case you should like to say a word to the young lady and gentleman private-like. A word from you would have a deal of weight. And I do assure you, miss, 'tis of no use trying to speak to old Mrs. Errington, for she'll only go on about her grandfather's coach-and-four; and, between you and me, miss, there is some as takes it amiss."

All this pained and surprised Minnie. She

understood at once how Castalia's ungracious manner was resented in the little town; and set down a great deal of the hostility which the widow had described to the score of the Honourable Mrs. Algernon's personal unpopularity.

Still there must be something seriously wrong at Ivy Lodge. Debt was a Slough of Despond into which such a one as Algernon Errington would easily put his foot, from sheer thoughtlessness and the habit of refusing himself no gratification within his reach. But he might not find it so easy to extricate himself. A word of warning might possibly do good. At least it could do no harm, beyond drawing forth some languid impertinence from Castalia. And Minnie would not for an instant weigh that chance against the hope of doing some good to her old friend Algy.

Besides, in truth, she had, as has been said, an undefined feeling of compassion for Castalia herself, which rendered her singularly forbearing towards the latter's manifestations of fretful jealousy or haughty dislike. In the first days of his return to Whitford Algernon had many a time shot one of his quick, questioning glances at Minnie, when his wife uttered some coolly insolent speech, directed at, rather than to, the rector's daughter. But instead of the keen sar-

casm, or scornful irony, which he had expected, Minnie had, nine times out of ten, replied with a quiet matter-of-fact observation calculated to extinguish anything like a war of words. At first Algernon had attributed such forbearance on the part of the brilliant, high-spirited Minnie entirely to her strong regard for himself. But this flattering illusion did not last long. He soon perceived that Minnie regarded his wife with pity, and that she refrained from using the keen weapons of her wit against Castalia, much as a nurse might refrain from scolding or arguing with a sick child.

Now this discovery was not pleasant to Algernon. If any sympathy were to be expended on the inmates of Ivy Lodge, he was persuaded that much the larger share of it ought to be given to himself. If there were troubles; if there were mortifications; if there was disappointment—who suffered from them as he did? And by whom were they so unmerited? He was not far, sometimes, from resenting any show of compassion for Castalia as a direct injury to himself. After having sacrificed himself, by making a marriage so inadequate to his deserts, it was a little too much to hear his wife pitied for the contrast between her past and present position?

And yet, by a queer strain of inconsistency

running through the warp and woof of his character, he would often boast of Castalia's aristocratic antecedents, and ask, with a smile and a shrug, how the deuce his wife could be expected to stand the petty privations and discomforts of Whitford, after having lived all her life in a sphere as remote from such things as the planet Saturn from the earth?

Minnie partly saw, partly guessed, these movements of Algernon's mind. But she judged him with leniency, and put a kind interpretation on his words and ways, whenever such an interpretation was possible. At all events, if a word in season could be useful to him, she would not refrain from speaking that word.

This young woman had latterly passed into regions of thought and feeling, from which much of her old life, with its old pains, and pleasures, and aims, seemed shrunken into insignificance. One solid good she was able to grasp and to enjoy; the satisfaction of serving her fellow-creatures. All else grew poor and paltry as the years rolled by.

Not that Minnie had attained to any saint-like heights of self-abnegation; not that she did not still "desire and admire" many sublunary things. But she had got a hurt that had stricken down her pride. She bore an ache in her heart

for which "self-culture," and all the activities and aspirations of her bright intellect, afforded no balm.

But she did not grow sour and selfish in her grief. The example of the poor, unlettered Methodist preacher (whom in former days she would have thought the unlikeliest of human beings to teach her any profitable lesson) had roused the noblest part of her nature to emulation. David Powell had started from a lofty theory to a life of beautiful deeds. Minnie Bodkin, vaguely groping after a theory, had seized on practical benevolence as a means to climb to some higher ideal.

In morals, as in thought, the Deductive and Inductive stand, like the ladders of Jacob's dream, reaching from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and the angels of the Lord descend and ascend them continually.

Minnie was roused from a reverie by the entrance of the preacher's tall figure into the kitchen, where the fire was now beginning to throw ruddy lights and fantastic shadows on to the white-washed walls.

"Don't be startled, Mr. Powell," she said, in her clear, sweet tones. "It is I—Minnie Bodkin. I thought I should like to see you, and to say a few words to you, quietly."

Powell advanced, and took her outstretched hand reverently in his hand. "The blessing of our Father in Heaven be on you, lady," he said. "Your kind face is very welcome to me."

CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. Thimbleby set a cup full of hot tea and a slice of bread on the table, and glided out of the kitchen in a humble, noiseless way, as if she feared lest the mere sound of her footsteps should be deemed importunate.

"You have something to say to me?" asked Powell, still standing opposite to Minnie's chair.

"Yes; but first you must take some food. Please to sit down there at the table."

Powell shook his head. "Food disgusts me," he said. "I do not need it."

"That will pain your kind landlady," said Minnie, gently. "She has been so careful to get this refreshment ready for you."

Powell sat down. "I would not pain the good soul for any earthly consideration," he answered. "But if the burthen be laid on me, I must pain her."

"Come, Mr. Powell, no injunction can be laid

on you to starve yourself, and grow ill, and be unable to fulfil your duties!"

After an instant's hesitation he swallowed some tea, and began to break off small fragments of the bread, which he soaked in the liquid, and ate slowly.

Minnie watched him attentively. The widow had lighted a candle, which, standing on the high mantelshelf, shed down its pale rays on the preacher's head and face, the rest of his person being in shadow. Now and again, as he lifted a morsel of bread to his lips, one thin long hand, yellow-white as old ivory, came within the circle of light. His whole countenance appeared to Minnie to have undergone a change since she had seen him last. The features were sharper, the skin more sallow, the lines around the mouth deeper. But the greatest change was in the expression of the eyes. They were wonderfully lustrous, but not with the soft mild lustre which formerly shone in them. They looked startlingly large and prominent; and at times seemed literally to blaze with an inward fire.

"He is ill and feverish," thought Minnie. And then, as she continued to watch him, there came over his face an expression so infinitely piteous, that the sympathetic tears sprang into her eyes when she saw it. It was a pathetic, questioning,

bewildered look, like that of a little child that has lost its way, and is frightened.

When he had eaten a few mouthfuls, he asked, "Who told you that you would find me here?"

"Oh, it was not difficult to discover your whereabouts in Whitford, Mr. Powell," answered Minnie, smiling with an effort to seem cheerful and at ease. "Your coming has been spoken of in our little town for weeks past."

"Has it so? Has it so? That is a good hearing. There must be souls ripe for conviction—anxious, inquiring souls."

There was a pause. Minnie had expected him to speak of their last interview. But as he made no allusion to it, she opened the subject herself.

"You remember, Mr. Powell, before you went away from Whitford, giving me a charge—a trust to fulfil for you?"

He looked at her inquiringly, but did not answer.

"There was a young member of your flock whose welfare you had greatly at heart. And you thought that I might be able to help her and show her some kindness. I—I have honestly tried to keep the promise I then made to you," persisted Minnie, on whom Powell's strange silence was producing an unpleasant impression. She could not

understand it. "I fancied that you might still feel some anxiety about Rhoda's welfare——"

At the sound of that name, Powell seemed moved as if by an electric shock. The change in his face was as distinct, although as momentary, as the change made in a dark bank of cloud by a flicker of summer lightning.

"You know, of course," continued Minnie, "that the person whose influence you feared is married. And I assure you that, so far as my attentive judgment goes, Rhoda's peace of mind has not been fatally troubled. She fretted for a while, but is now rapidly regaining her cheerfulness. She even visits rather frequently at Mr. Errington's house, having, it seems, become a favourite with his wife."

David Powell's head had sunk down on to his breast. He held one hand across his eyes, resting his elbow on the table, and neither moving nor looking up. But it was evident that he was listening. Minnie went on to speak of Rhoda's improvement. She had always been pretty, but her beauty was now very striking. She had profited by the opportunities of instruction which her father afforded her. She was caressed by the worthiest people in her little world.

Minnie went bravely on—nerved by the sight of that bowed figure and emaciated hand, hiding

the eyes—speaking the praises of the girl who had sent many a pang of jealousy into her heart—a jealousy none the less torturing because she knew it to be unreasonable. "He could never have thought of wretched, crippled me, if there had been no Rhoda Maxfield in the world!" she had told herself a hundred times. But she tried to fancy that the withering up of the secret romance of her life would have been less hard to bear, had the sacrifice been made in favour of a higher, nobler woman than simple, shallow, slight-hearted Rhoda Maxfield.

Nevertheless, she spoke Rhoda's praises now ungrudgingly. Nay, more; she believed Powell to be capable of the highest self-sacrifice; she believed that he would welcome a prospect of happiness and security for Rhoda, even though it should shut the door for ever on any lingering hopes he might retain of winning her. So, bracing herself to a strong effort—which seemed to strain not only the nerves, but the very muscles, of her fragile frame as she sat almost upright, grasping the arms of her chair with both hands—she added, "And, as I know you have that rare gift of love which can rejoice in looking at a happiness it may never share, I will say to you in confidence that I believe Rhoda is honourably sought in marriage by a good man—a man who—it is not needful to speak

at length of him"—indeed, her throat was dry, and her courage desperately at bay—"but he is a good, high-minded man; one who will value and respect his wife; one who admires and loves Rhoda very fervently."

It was magnanimously said. The words, as she uttered them, sounded the knell of her own youth and hope in her ears.

We believe that a beloved one is dead. We have kissed the cold lips. We have kissed the unresponsive hand. Yes; the beloved one is dead. We surely believe it.

But, no! The death-bell sounds, beating with chill, heavy fingers on our very heart-strings, and then we awake to a sudden confirmation of our grief. The bell sings its loud monotone, over roof-tree and grave-stone, piercing through the murmur of busy life in streets and homes, and then we know that we had not hitherto believed; that in some nook and secret fold of heart or brain a wild, formless hope had been lurking that all was not really over. Only the implacable mental clang carries conviction with its vibrations into the broad daylight and the common air, and the tears gush out as if our sorrow were born anew.

Even so felt Minnie Bodkin when she had put her secret thought into words. The speaking of the words could not hasten their fulfilment. But

yet it seemed to her as if, in saying them, she had signed some bond—had formally renounced even the solace of a passing fancy that might flit, fairy-bright, into the dimness of her life; had given up the object of her silent passion by a covenant that was none the less stringent because its utterance was simple and commonplace. She was silent, breathing quickly, and lying back against the cushions after the short speech that had cost her so much.

Powell remained quite still for a few seconds. Then suddenly removing the screening hand, the almost intolerable lustre of his eyes broke upon the startled woman opposite to him, as he said, with a strange smile, "She is safe. She is happy for Time and Eternity. She has been ransomed with a price."

"I knew that you would allow no selfish feeling to sway you," returned Minnie, after an instant's pause. "I was right in feeling sure that you would generously consider her happiness before your own."

But yet she was not satisfied with the result of her well-meant attempt to free Powell's mind from the anxiety concerning Rhoda, which she believed to have been preying on it. There was something strangely unexpected in his manner of receiving it. Presently Powell looked at her again

with a sad, sweet smile. The wild blaze had gone out of his eyes. They were soft and steady as they rested on her now.

"You are a just and benevolent woman," he said. "You have been faithful. You came hither with the charitable wish to comfort me. I am not ungrateful. But the old trouble has long been dead. I did wrestle with a mighty temptation on her account. My heart burnt very hot within me; the fleshy heart, full of deceit and desperately wicked. But that human passion fell away like a garment, shrivelled and consumed by the great fire of the wrath of God, that put it out as the sun puts out the flame of a taper at noonday. Neither," he went on, speaking rather to himself than to Minnie, "am I concerned for that young soul. No; it is safe. It has been ransomed. I have had answer to prayer, and heard voices that brought me sure tidings in the dimness of the early morning; but these things are hard to be understood. Sometimes, even yet, the old, foolish yearning of the heart seems to awake and stir blindly within me. When you named that name —no lips had uttered it to my ears for many months—there seemed to run a swift echo of it through all the secret places of my soul! But I heard as though one dead should hear the beat of a familiar footfall above his grave."

The dusk of evening, the low thrilling tones of the preacher's voice, the terrible pallor of his face, with its great glittering eyes shining in the feeble rays of the candle, contributed, not less than the strangeness of his words, to oppress Minnie with a sensation of nervous dread. She was not afraid of David Powell, nor of anything that she could see or touch. But vague terrors seemed to be floating in the air.

She started as her eye was caught by a deep, mysterious shadow on the wall. The fire had burnt low, and shed only a dull red glow upon the hearth. The ticking of the old clock appeared to grow louder with every beat, and to utter some ominous warning in an unknown tongue.

All at once a sound of voices and footsteps in the passage broke the spell. The fire cast only commonplace and comprehensible shadows. The clock ticked with its ordinary indifferent tone. The preacher's pale face ceased to float in a mystical light against the dark background of the curtainless window. The everyday world entered in at the kitchen door in the shape of Mr. Diamond and Rhoda Maxfield.

Of the four persons thus unexpectedly assembled, Minnie was the first to speak.

"What, Rhoda!" she cried, in a quiet voice,

which revealed much less surprise than she felt. "What brought you here at this hour?"

As she spoke she glanced anxiously at Powell, uneasy as to the effect on him of Rhoda's sudden appearance. But he remained curiously impassible, looking at those present as if they were objects dimly seen afar off.

"I was coming to drink tea with Mrs. Errington. Mr. Diamond overtook me and Sally in the street. I saw your carriage at the door, and looked in here, hoping that I should find both you and Mrs. Errington in this room, because I know you do not go upstairs."

Thus spoke Rhoda, in a soft, tremulous little voice, and with downcast eyes. Diamond came and shook hands with Minnie. He pressed the hand she gave him with unusual warmth and emphasis. His eyes were bright, and there was a glow of pleasure on his face. He believed that his suit was prospering, and he wished to convey some hint of his hopeful anticipations to his sympathising friend Miss Bodkin. Then he turned to Powell, and touched him on the shoulder. "How are you to-night?" he asked, in a friendly tone, not without a kind of superior pity. "I am glad to see that you have been refreshing the inner man. Our friend is too careless of his health, Miss Bodkin. He fasts too long, and too often."

Powell smiled slightly, but neither looked at him nor answered him. Going straight to Rhoda he laid his hand on her bright chestnut hair, from which the bonnet she wore had fallen backwards, and looked at her solemnly. Rhoda turned pale and gazed back at him, as if fascinated. Neither of the others spoke or moved.

"It is true, then," said Powell, after a pause, and the low tones of his voice sounded like soft music. "I have passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and between me and the dwellers under the light of the sun there is a great gulf fixed!"

He released the bright young head on which his hand had rested, and made as if he would move away. Then, pausing, he said, "I frightened you long ago—in the other life. Fear no more, Rhoda Maxfield. Be no more disquieted by night or by day. Many are called, but few are chosen, yet you are among the chosen." He smiled upon her very sadly and calmly, and went slowly away without looking round.

As soon as he was gone, Rhoda burst into tears. Diamond made an eager step forward as if to take her hand; then stopped irresolutely, and looked anxiously at Minnie. "She is so sensitive," he said half aloud. Minnie was as white as the preacher, and her eyes were full of tears, which, however, she

checked from falling by a strong effort of her will. "I must go," she said. "Rhoda tells me my carriage is here. Will you kindly call my servants?" He obeyed her, first making his formal little bow; a sign, under the circumstances, that he was not quite in sympathy with his friend, who showed so little sympathy herself for that "sensitiveness" which so moved him. However, when, assisted by Jane, Miss Bodkin had made her way to the door, Mr. Diamond stood there bare-headed to help her into the carriage. She put her hand for an instant on his proffered arm as she got into the vehicle. Rhoda came running out after her. "Good night, Miss Minnie!" she cried.

Minnie leant back, and seemed neither to see nor hear her. But in an instant she was moved by a generous impulse to put her head out of the window, and say kindly, "Good night, Rhoda. Come and see me soon."

As the carriage began to move away, she saw Diamond tenderly drawing Rhoda's shawl round her shoulders, and trying to lead her in from the chill of the evening air.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Well, you may say as you please, Mr. Jackson, but 'twas a sight I shall never forget; and one I don't expect to see the like of on this side eternity," said Richard Gibbs.

"No, nor don't wish to, I should think," put in Seth Maxfield.

"Anyway, it was a wonderful manifestation," remarked Mr. Gladwish, musingly.

There was a little knot of Wesleyans assembled in the house of Mr. Gladwish, the shoemaker. Since Jonathan Maxfield's defection, he might be considered the leading member of the Methodist congregation. And a weekly prayer-meeting was held at his house on Monday evenings, as it had formerly been held in old Max's back parlour.

On the present occasion the assembly was more numerous than usual. Besides the accustomed cronies and Mr. Jackson the preacher, there were

also Seth Maxfield, who had come into Whitford on some farm business on the previous Saturday, Richard Gibbs, and the widow Thimbleby. The latter was an old acquaintance of Mrs. Gladwish, and much patronised by that matron; although, of late, Mrs. Thimbleby had been under some cloud of displeasure among the stricter Methodists, on account of her fidelity to David Powell.

There had not been, to say the truth, any very fervent or lengthy religious exercises that evening. After a brief discourse by Brother Jackson, and the singing of a hymn, the company had, by mutual agreement, understood but not expressed, fallen into a discussion of the topic which was at that time in the minds and mouths of most Whitford persons high and low—namely, David Powell's preachings, and the phenomena attendant thereon.

"Anyhow," repeated Mr. Gladwish, after a short silence, "it was a wonderful manifestation."

"You may well say so, sir," assented Richard Gibbs, emphatically.

"Humph," grunted out Brother Jackson, pursing up his thick lips and folding his fat hands before him; "I misdoubt whether the enemy be not mixed up somehow or other with these manifestations. I don't say they are wholly his doing.

But—my brethren, Satan is very wily; and is continually 'going to and fro in the earth,' and 'walking up and down in it,' even as in the days of Job."

"That's very true," said Mrs. Gladwish, with an air of responsible corroboration. She was a light-haired, pale-faced woman, with a slatternly figure and a sharp, inquisitive nose; and her quiet persistency in cross-questioning made her a little formidable to some of her neighbours.

"When I see a thorn-tree bring forth figs, or a thistle grapes, I will believe that such things as I witnessed yesterday on Whit Meadow are the work of Satan—not before!" rejoined Gibbs.

"Amen!" said Mrs. Thimbleby, tremulously. "Oh! indeed, sir—I hope you don't consider it presumption in me—but I must say I do think Mr. Gibbs is right. It was the working of the Lord's spirit, and no other."

"What was the working of the Lord's spirit?" asked a harsh voice that made the women start, and caused every head in the room to be turned towards the door. There stood Jonathan Maxfield, rather more bowed in the shoulders than when we first made his acquaintance, but otherwise little changed.

He was welcomed by Gladwish with a marked show of respect. The breach made between old

Max and his former associates by his departure from the Methodist Society had been soon healed in many instances. Gladwish had condoned it long ago; and, owing to various circumstances—among them the fact that Seth Maxfield and his wife remained among the Wesleyans—the intercourse between the two families had been almost uninterrupted. There was truly no cordial interchange of hospitalities, nor much that could be called companionship; but the strong bond of habit on both sides, and, on Gladwish's, the sense of his neighbour's growing wealth and importance, served to keep the two men as close together as they ever had been.

"I've come to say a word to Seth, if it may be without putting you out," said old Maxfield, with a sidelong nod of the head, that was intended as a general salute to the company.

Mr. and Mrs. Gladwish protested that no one would be in the least put out by Mr. Maxfield's presence, but that they were all, on the contrary, pleased to see him. Then, while the father and son said a few words to each other in a low tone, the others conversed among themselves rather loudly, by way of politely expressing that they did not wish to overhear any private conversation.

"That's all, then, Seth," said old Max, turning away from his son. "I knew I should find you

here, and I thought I would mention about them freeholds before it slipped my memory. And—life is uncertain—I have put a clause in my will about 'em this very evening. Putting off has never been my plan, neither with the affairs of this world or the next."

There was something in the mention of a clause in old Max's will which had a powerful attraction for the imagination of most persons present. Brother Jackson made a motion with his mouth, as though he were tasting some pleasant savour. Mrs. Gladwish thought of her tribe of growing children, and their rapid consumption of food, clothing, and doctor's stuff, and she sighed. Two or three of the regular attendants at the prayer-meeting fixed their eyes with lively interest on Jonathan Maxfield; and one whispered to another that Seth had gotten a good bit o' cash with his wife, and would have more from his father. 'Twas always the way: money makes money. Though, rightly considered, it was but dross and dust, and riches were an awful snare. And then they obsequiously made way for the rich grocer to take a seat in their circle, moved, perhaps, by compassion for the imminent peril to his soul which he was incurring from the possession of freehold property.

"Well, I'll sit down for half an hour," said Jonathan, in his dry way, and took a chair near the

table accordingly. In fact, he was well pleased enough to find himself once more among his old associates; and if any embarrassment belonged to the relations between himself and Brother Jackson, his former pastor, it was certain that old Max did not feel it. When a man has a profound conviction of his own wisdom, supported on a firm basis of banker's books and solid investments, such intangible sentimentalities have no power to constrain them. Mr. Jackson, perhaps, felt some little difficulty in becomingly adjusting his manner to the situation, being troubled between the desire of asserting his dignity in the eyes of his flock and his natural reluctance to affront a man of Jonathan Maxfield's weight in the world. But he speedily hit on the assumption of an unctuous charity and toleration, as being the kind of demeanour best calculated for the circumstances. And perhaps he did not judge amiss. "I'm sure," said he, with a pious smile, "it is a real joy to the hearts of the faithful, and a good example to the unregenerate, to see believers dwelling together in unity, however much they may be compelled to differ on some points for conscience' sake."

"What was it as some one was saying just now about the working of the Lord's spirit?" asked Maxfield, cutting short Brother Jackson's verbal flow of milk and honey.

There was a little hesitation among those present as to who should answer this question. To answer it involved the utterance of a name which was known to be unpleasing in Mr. Maxfield's ears. Mrs. Thimbleby shrank into the background; she had a special dread of old Jonathan's stern hard face and manner. Richard Gibbs at length answered, simply, "We were speaking, Mr. Maxfield, of David Powell's preaching in Lady Lane and on Whit Meadow."

Maxfield pressed his lips together, and made an inarticulate sound, which might be taken to express contempt or disapprobation, or merely an acknowledgment of Gibbs's information.

"My! I should like to have been there!" exclaimed Mrs. Gladwish.

"Well, now," said Seth Maxfield, "my wife would walk twenty mile to keep out of the way of it. She was quite scared at all the accounts we heard."

"But what did you hear! And what did happen, after all?" asked Mrs. Gladwish. "I wish you would give us an account of it, Mr. Gibbs."

"It is hard to give an account of such thing to them as wasn't present, ma'am. But there was a great outpouring of grace."

Brother Jackson groaned slightly, then coughed, and shook his head.

"I never saw such a beautiful evening for the time of year," put in one of Gladwish's apprentices, a consumptive-looking lad with bright, dreamy eyes. "And all the folks standing in the sunset, and the river shining, and the leaves red and yellow on the branches—it was a wonderful sight."

"It was a wonderful sight!" ejaculated Gibbs. "There was the biggest multitude I ever saw assembled in Whit Meadow. There must have been thousands of people. There were among them scoffers, and ungodly men, and seekers after the truth, and some that were already awakened. Then, women and children; they came gathering together more and more, from the north, and the south, and the east, and the west. And there, in the midst, raised up on a high bench, so that he might be seen of all, stood David Powell. His face was as white as snow, and his black hair hung down on either side of it."

"I thought of John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness," said the apprentice softly.

"I couldn't get to stand very near to him," continued Gibbs, "and I thought I should catch but little of his discourse. But when he began to speak, though his voice was low at first, after a while it rose, and grew every moment fuller and stronger."

"Yes," said the bright-eyed apprentice, "it was like listening to the organ-pipes of St. Chad's; just that kind of tremble in it that seems to run all through your body."

"The man always had a goodish voice," said Brother Jackson. "But that is a carnal gift. 'Tis the use we put our voices to that is all-important, my dear friends."

"He began by prayer," said Gibbs, speaking slowly, and with the abstracted air of a man who is not so much endeavouring to give others a vivid narration, as to recall accurately to his own mind the things of which he is speaking. "Yes, he began with prayer. He prayed for us all there present with wonderful fervour."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Gladwish.

"Nay, I cannot repeat the exact words."

"Can't you remember, Joel?" persisted his mistress, addressing the young apprentice.

The lad blushed up, but more, apparently, from eagerness and excitement than bashfulness, as he answered, "Not the very words, ma'am, I can't remember. But it was a prayer that had wings like, and it lifted you up right away into the heavens. When he left off I felt as if I had been dropped straight down on to Whit Meadow out of a cloud of glory."

"Well, there's no harm in all that, Brother Jackson?" said Gladwish, looking round.

"Harm!" echoed Gibbs. "Why, Mr. Gladwish, if you could but have seen the faces of the people! And then presently he began to call sinners to repentance with such power as I never witnessed—no, not when he was preaching in our chapel two years ago. He spoke of wrath and judgment until the whole field was full of the sound of crying and groaning. But he seemed continually strengthened, and went on, until first one fell, and then another. They dropped down just like dead when the arrows of conviction entered their souls. And the cries of some of them were awful to hear. Then there was weeping, and a kind of hard breathing and panting from breasts oppressed with the weight of sin; and then, mixed with those sounds, the rejoicing aloud of believers and those who received assurance. But through all the preacher's voice rose above the tumult, and it seemed to me almost a manifest miracle that he should be able to make himself heard so clearly."

"Aye," said Joel, "it was like a ship on the top of the stormy waves; now high, now low, but always above the raging waters."

There was a short silence. Those present looked first at each other and then at old Max,

who sat motionless and grim, with his elbow on the table, and his chin resting on his clenched hand.

"And did you really see any of the poor creeturs as was took?" asked Mrs. Gladwish of the widow Thimbleby.

"Took, ma'am?"

"Took with fits, or whatever it was."

"Oh! yes; I see several. There was a fine fresh-coloured young man, which is a butcher out Duckwell way—Mr. Seth 'll likely know him—and he dropped down just like a bullock. And then he stamped, and struggled, and grew an awful dark red colour in the face, and tore up the grass with his hands; such was the power of conviction. And at last he lay like a log, and 'twas an hour, or more, before he come to. But when he did, he had got peace and his burthen was taken away, thanks be!"

"And there was a girl, too, very poor and sickly-looking," said Joel. "And when the power of the Lord came upon her she went into a kind of trance. Her eyes were open, but she saw nothing. Tears were falling down her cheeks, but they were tears of joy; for she kept on saying, 'How Thou hast loved sinners!' over and over again. And there was such a smile on her face! When we go to Heaven, I expect we shall see the angels smile like that!"

"And the man himself—the preacher—did he seem filled with joy and peace?" asked Jackson, covertly malicious.

"Why, that is the strange thing!" returned Richard Gibbs, with frank simplicity. "Although he was doing this great work, and witnessing the mercies of the Lord descend on the people like manna, yet Mr. Powell had such a look of deep sorrow on his face as I never saw. It was a kind of a fixed, hopeless look. He said, 'I speak to you out of a dark dungeon, but you are in the light. Give thanks and rejoice, and hasten to make your calling and election sure. Those who dwell in the blackness of the shadow could tell you terrible things.'"

Mrs. Thimbleby wiped away a tear with the corner of her shabby black shawl. "Ah!" she sighed, "it do seem a hard dispensation and a strange one, as him who brings glad tidings to so many shouldn't get peace himself. And a more angelic creetur' in his kindness to the afflicted never walked this earth. Yet he's a'most always bowed down with heaviness of spirit. It do seem strange!"

Jonathan Maxfield struck the table with his fist so hard that the candlesticks standing on it rocked. "Strange!" he cried, "it would be strange indeed to see anything else! Why this is the work of the

enemy as plain as possible. Don't tell me! Look at all the years I've been a member of Christian congregations in Whitford—whether in chapel or church, it is no matter—and tell me if ever there was known such ravings, and fits, and Bedlam doings? And yet I suppose there were souls saved in my time too! I say that Satan is busy among you, puffing up one and another with sperritual pride."

"Lord forgive you!" ejaculated Richard Gibbs, in a tone of such genuine pity and conviction as startled the rest.

"Lord forgive me, sir!" echoed old Max, turning slowly round upon the speaker, and glaring at him from under his grey eyebrows.

There was an awe-stricken silence.

"Our good friend, Richard Gibbs, meant no offence, Mr. Maxfield," said Jackson, looking everywhere except into Gibbs's face.

"I say," cried Maxfield, addressing the rest of the company, and entirely ignoring the rash delinquent Gibbs, "that these things are a snare and a delusion, and the work of the devil. And when them of more wisdom and experience than me comes forward to speak on the matter, I shall be glad to show forth my reasons."

"Why, but, Brother Maxfield, I don't know now. I don't feel so sure," said Gladwish, on

whom the accounts of Powell's preaching had produced a considerable effect. "There have been cases, you know, in the early times of Methodism; and John Wesley himself, you know, was ready to believe in the workings of grace, as manifested in similar ways."

"Don't tell me of your David Powells!" returned old Max, declining to discuss the subject on wide or general grounds, but doggedly confining himself to the particulars immediately before him. "Don't tell me of a man as is blown out with pride and vain glory like a balloon. Did I, or did I not, say more'n two years ago, that David Powell was getting puffed up with presumptuousness?"

There was a low murmur of assent. Brother Jackson closed his eyes and uttered a deep, long-drawn "A-a-ah!" like a man reluctantly admitting a painful truth.

"Did I, or did I not, say to many members of the Society, 'This man is dangerous. He has fallen from grace. He is hankering after new-fangled doctrine, and is ramping with red-hot over-bearingness?'"

"You did, sir," answered a stout, broad-faced man named Blogg, who looked like a farmer, but was a linendraper in a small way of business.

"You said so frequently; I remember your very words, and can testify to 'em."

(This speech appeared to produce a considerable effect. Mrs. Thimbleby began to cry; and, not having an apron at hand, threw the corner of her shawl over her face.)

"Did I, or did I not, say that if things went on at this kind of rate, I should withdraw from the Society? And did I, or did I not, withdraw from it accordin'?"

"Sir," said Mr. Blogg, "I saw you with my own eyes a-coming out of the parish church of St. Chad's, at ten minutes to one o'clock in the afternoon of the Sunday next following your utterance of them identical expressions; and cannot deny or evade the truth, but must declare it to the best of my ability, with no regard to any human respects, but for the ease and liberation of my conscience as a sincere though humble professor."

There was a general feeling that, in some conclusive though mysterious way, the linendraper had brought a crushing weight of evidence to bear against David Powell; and even the preacher's best friends would find it difficult to defend him after that!

Old Max looked round triumphantly, and pro-

ceeded to follow up the impression thus made. "And then I'm to be told," said he, "that the lunatic doings on Whit Meadow are the work of Heavenly powers, eh? Come, Gladwish—you're a man as has read theologies and controversies, and are acquainted with the history of Wesleyan Methodism as well as most members in Whitford—I should like to know what arguments you have to advance against plain facts—facts known to us all, and testified to by Robert Blogg, linendraper, now present, and for many years a respected class-leader in this town?"

"Well, but we have plain facts to bring forward too," said Richard Gibbs, with anxious earnestness.

"I ask you, Gladwish, what arguments you have to bring forward," repeated Maxfield, determinedly repressing any outward sign of having heard the presumptuous Gibbs.

"If this be not Satan's doing, I have no knowledge of the words of the devil, and I suppose I shall hardly be told that, after regular attendance in a congregation of Wesleyan Methodists for fifty odd years, man and boy! But," continued the old man, after a short silence, which none of those present ventured to break, "there's no knowing, truly. These are new-fangled days. I cannot say but what I may live

to hear it declared that I know nothing of Satan, nor cannot discern his works when I see them!"

"Nay, father," said Seth Maxfield, speaking now for the first time, in deprecation of so serious a charge against the "new-fangled days," on which Whitford had fallen. "Nay, no man will say that, nor yet think it. But my notion is, that it may neither be Heaven nor t'other place that has much to do with these kind of fits and screechings. I believe it to be just as Dr. Evans said—and he a Welshman himself, you'll remember—when he first heard of these doings of David Powell in Wales. Says he, 'It's a epidemic,' says the doctor. 'A catching kind of nervous disease, neither more nor less. And you may any of you get it if you go to hear and see the others. Though forewarned is forearmed in such cases,' says the doctor. 'And the better you understand the real natur' of the disorder, the safer you'll be from it.'"

Seth was of a materialistic and practical turn of mind, and he offered this hypothesis as an explanation which had approved itself to his own judgment (not because he thoroughly comprehended Dr. Evans's statements, but rather because of the inherent repugnance of his mind to accept a supernatural theory about any phenomenon, when

a natural theory might be substituted for it), and also as a neutral ground of conciliation, whereon the opposing celestial and diabolic partisans might meet half way. But it speedily appeared that he had miscalculated in so doing. Neither the friends nor the opponents of David Powell would for an instant admit any such rationalistic suggestion. It was scouted on all hands. And Seth, who had no gift of controversy, speedily found himself reduced to silence.

"Well," said he, quietly, when he and his father rose to go away, "think what you please, but I know that if one of my reapers was to fall down in the field that way, let him be praying or cursing, I should consider it a hospital case."

"Good night, Gladwish," said old Max. "Good night, Mrs. Gladwish. I am glad, for the sake of all the decent, sober, godly members of the Society, as this firebrand had left it before things came to this pass. And I only wish you'd all had the gift of clear-sightedness to see through him long ago, and cut yourselves off from him as I did."

Richard Gibbs advanced towards the old man with outstretched hand. "I hope, Mr. Maxfield," he said, humbly, "that you'll not think I meant any offence to you just now. But I was so full of

conviction, and you know we can but speak the truth to the best of our power. I hope you, nor any other Christian man, will be in wrath with me, because we don't see things just alike. I know Mr. Powell is always for making peace, for he says we many a time fancy we're fighting the Lord's battles, when, in truth, we are only desiring victory for our own pride. Anyway, I know he would bid me ask pardon for a hasty word, if any offence had come by it. And so I hope you'll shake hands."

Jonathan Maxfield took no notice of the proffered hand, neither did he make any answer directly. But as he reached the door he turned round and said, "Well, Mr. Jackson, you have your work cut out for you with some of your flock, I doubt. Like to like. I expect that ranting Welshman will draw some away from decent chapel-going. But them as admires such doings are best got rid of, and that speedily." With that he walked off.

"I think Maxfield was rather hard on poor Dicky Gibbs," said Mr. Gladwish to his spouse when they were alone together. "He might ha' shook hands. Dicky came forward in a real Christian spirit. Maxfield was very hard in his wrath."

"Well," returned the virtuous matron, "I

can't so much wonder. Having the Lord's forgiveness called down on his head in that way! And I don't know, Gladwish, as we should like it ourselves!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Minnie Bodkin had not dismissed from her mind the rumours about Algernon Errington, which she had heard from the widow Thimbleby. After some consideration she resolved to speak to him directly on the subject, and decided on the manner of doing so.

"I will not try to speak to him in the presence of other people," she thought. "He would wriggle off and slip through my fingers if he found the conversation had any tendency to become disagreeable. And then, too, it might be difficult to speak to him without interruption.

This latter consideration had reference to Minnie's observation of Mrs. Algernon, who never saw her husband engaged in conversation with Miss Bodkin without unceremoniously thrusting herself between them.

The result of Minnie's deliberations was the

sending of the following note to the Whitford Post-office:—

"My dear Algernon,—I want to say a word to you quietly. Can you come to me on your way home this afternoon? I will be ready to receive you at any hour between four and six. Don't disappoint your old friend, M. B."

At a few minutes before five that evening Mr. Ancram Errington presented himself at Dr. Bodkin's house, and was shown up to Minnie's room.

It was one of Minnie's good days. She was seated in her lounging-chair by the fire, but she was not altogether reclining in it—merely leaning a little back against the cushions. A small writing-table stood in front of her. It was covered with papers—amongst them a copy of the local newspaper—and she had evidently been busily occupied. When Algernon entered she held out her hand with a smile of welcome. "This is very good!" she exclaimed. "I was not sure that I should succeed in tearing your postmastership away from the multifarious duties——"

Algernon winced, and held up his hand. "Don't, Minnie!" he cried. "For mercy's sake, let me forget all that for half an hour!"

"Oh, reassure yourself, most overworked of public servants! It is not about the conveyance of his Majesty's mails that I am going to talk to you."

"Upon my word, I am infinitely relieved to hear it."

And, indeed, his countenance brightened at once, and he took a chair opposite to Minnie with all his old nonchalant gaiety.

"How you hate your office!" said Minnie, looking at him curiously. "More, even, than your native laziness—which I know to be considerable—would seem to account for."

"Not at all! There is no difficulty in accounting for my distaste for the whole business. There can be no difficulty. It is the simplest, most obvious thing in the world!"

"Don't things go smoothly? Have you any special troubles or difficulties in the office, Algernon?"

"Special troubles! My dear Minnie, what on earth are you driving at?"

"I am 'driving' at nothing more than the simple sense of my words implies," she answered, with a marked shade of surprise in her countenance. "I mean just what I say. Is your work going pretty smoothly? Have you any complaints? Does your clerk do well?"

"Oh, Gibbs? Capitally, capitally! Old Obadiah is a first-rate fellow. Did you know his name was Obadiah? Absurd name, isn't it? Oh yes; he's all right. I trust him entirely—blindly. He has the whole thing in his hands. He might do anything he liked in the office. I have every confidence in Gibbs. But now, Minnie, let us have done with the subject. If you had as much of it as I have you would understand——Come, dismiss the bugaboo, or I shall think you have entrapped me here to talk to me about the post-office. And I warn you I don't think I should be able to stand that, even from you!"

"How absurdly you are exaggerating, Algy," said Minnie, shaking her head at him, and yet smiling a little at the same time. "But be at peace. I have nothing to say on the subject of the Whitford post-office. My discourse will chiefly concern the Whitford postmaster, and——No! Don't be so ridiculous! not in his official capacity, either!"

"Oh! Well, in his private character, I should think it impossible to find a more delightful topic of conversation than that interesting and accomplished individual," returned Errington, laughing and settling himself comfortably in his chair.

"I hope it may prove so. Tell me, first, how is Mrs. Algernon Ancram Errington?"

"Why, Castalia is not very well, I think, although I don't know what is the matter. She grows thinner and thinner, and sallower and sallower. *Entre nous,* Minnie, she frets and chafes against our life here. She has not the gift of looking on the bright side of things. She is rather peevish by nature. It's a little trying sometimes, coming on the back of all the other botherations. Ha! There!" (passing his hand quickly across his forehead) "let us say no more on that subject either. And now to return to the interesting topic—the delightful and accomplished—eh? What have you to say to me?"

Minnie seized on the opportunity, which chance had afforded her, to introduce the matter she wished to speak about.

"Do you think your wife is annoyed by the importunities of tradespeople, Algy? That would be enough to fret her and sour her temper."

"Importunities of tradespeople? Good gracious, no! And, besides, I don't think Castalia would allow the importunities of tradespeople to disturb her much. I should fancy that a Bourbon princess could scarcely look on such folks from a more magnificent elevation than poor Castalia does. But, *Que voulez-vous?* She was brought up in that sort of hauteur."

"I quite believe in your wife's disregard for

the feelings of the tradespeople," answered Minnie drily. "But this is a question of her own feelings, you see. Come, Algernon, may I take the privilege of our old friendship, and speak to you quite frankly?"

"Pray do, my dear Minnie. You know I always loved frankness."

He looked the picture of candour as he turned his bright blue eyes on his friend.

"Well, then, to begin with a question. Do you not owe money to several persons in Whitford?"

"My dear Minnie, don't look so solemn, for mercy's sake! 'Owe money!' Why I suppose everybody owes money. A few pounds would cover all my debts. I assure you I am never troubled on the subject."

"I am glad to hear it. But—will you forgive the liberty I am taking for the sake of my motive, and give me *carte blanche* to be as impertinent as I please."

"With all my heart!" he answered unhesitatingly.

"Thanks, Algy. Then, to proceed without circumlocution: I am afraid that, since neither you nor your wife are accustomed to domestic economy, you may possibly be spending more money than is quite prudent, without being aware of it. You say

you are not disturbed by your debts; but, Algy, I hear things on this subject which are never likely to reach your ears; or not until it is too late for the knowledge of them to serve you. And I have reason to think that there is a good deal of unpleasant feeling among the Whitford tradespeople about you and yours."

"You will excuse me for observing that the Whitford tradespeople always have been, within my recollection, a set of pig-headed, prejudicial ignoramuses, and that I see no reason to apprehend any speedy improvement in the intelligence of that highly respectable body."

"Don't laugh, Algernon. The matter is serious. You have not been troubled yet, you say. But the trouble may begin at any moment, and I should wish you to be prepared to meet it. You may have bills sent in which——"

"Bills? Oh, as to that, there's no lack of them already! I must acknowledge the great alacrity and punctuality with which the mercantile classes of this town send in their weekly accounts. Oh dear yes, I have a considerable collection of those interesting documents; so many, in fact, that the other day, when Castalia was complaining of the shabbiness of the paperhangings in our dining-room, I proposed to her to cover the walls with the tradesmen's bills. It would be novel, economical,

and moral; a kind of *memento mori*—a death's head at the feast! Fancy seeing your butcher's bill glaring down above the roast mutton every day, and the greengrocer's 'To account delivered,' restraining the spoon that might otherwise too lavishly dispense the contents of the vegetable dishes!"

"Algy, Algy!"

"Upon my honour, Minnie, I made the suggestion. But Castalia looked as grave as a judge. She didn't see it at all. The fact is, poor Cassy's sense of humour is merely rudimentary."

Minnie joined her hands together on the table, and thus supported, she leant a little forward, and looked searchingly at the young man.

"Algernon," she said with slow deliberation, "I begin to be afraid that the case is worse than I thought."

"What do you mean?" he asked, almost roughly, and with a sudden change of colour.

"I mean that you really are in difficult waters. How has it come to pass that the weekly accounts have accumulated in this way?"

He laughed a little forced laugh, but he looked relieved, too.

"The process is simple. They keep sending 'em in!"

"And then it is said—forgive me if I appear intrusive—that you gave orders for wine and such things out of Whitford. And that does not incline the people of the place to be patient."

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed Algernon, throwing himself back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his pockets, "that is the most absurd—the most irrational—the most preposterous reason for being angry with me! They grumble when I run up a bill with them, and they are affronted when I don't!"

"Does your wife understand—or—or control the household expenditure?"

"Bless you, no! She has not the very vaguest ideas of anything of the kind. When she had an allowance from her uncle for her dress, my lord used to have to come down every now and then with a supplementary sum of money to get her out of debt."

He spoke with an air of perfectly easy amusement, and without a trace of anxiety; unless, perhaps, an accustomed ear might have detected some constraint in his voice.

"But could she not be made to understand? Why not give her some hints on domestic economy? It should be done kindly, of course. And surely her own good sense—"

Algernon pursed up his mouth and raised his eyebrows.

"She considers herself an unexampled victim as it is. I think 'lessons on domestic economy' would about put the finishing stroke to the internal felicity of Ivy Lodge!"

Minnie looked pained. They were trenching here on ground on which she had no intention of venturing farther. It formed no part of her plan to be drawn into a discussion respecting the defects and shortcomings of Algernon's wife. She was silent.

Algernon got up from his chair, and came and stood before Minnie, taking both her hands in his.

"My dear girl," he said, "I cannot tell you how much I feel your kindness and friendship. But, now, pray don't look so terribly like the tragic muse! I assure you there is no need, as far as we are concerned. Castalia is perhaps a little extravagant; but, after all, what does it amount to? A few pounds would cover all I owe. The whole of our budget is a mere bagatelle. The fact is, you have attached too much importance to the chatter of these thick-headed boobies. They hate us, I suppose, because Castalia's uncle is a peer of the realm, and because we dine late, and because we prefer claret to Double X

—or for some equally excellent and conclusive reasons."

"I don't know that they hate you, Algy," returned Minnie, but not with an air of very perfect conviction. "And, after all, it is scarcely a proof of personal malignity to wish to be paid one's bill!"

Algernon laughed quite genuinely. "Oh yes it is!" he cried. "A proof of the direst malignity. What worse can they do?"

"Well, Algernon, I cannot presume to push my sermonisings on you any farther. You will give me credit at least for having ventured to make them from a single-minded wish to be of some service to you."

"My dear Minnie! you are the 'best fellow' in the world! (You remember I used to call you so in my saucy, school-boy days, and when your majesty condescended to permit my impertinences?) And to show you how thoroughly I appreciate your friendship, I don't mind telling you that when I am removed from this d—— delightful berth that I now occupy, I shall have to get Uncle Seely to help us out a little. But I feel no scruple about that. Something is due to me. I ought never to have been placed here at all. Well, no matter! It was a mistake. My lord sees it now, and he is setting to work in earnest for me in other quarters.

I have every reason to believe that I shall get very pretty promotion before long. It isn't my business to go about proclaiming this to the butchers and bakers, is it? And between you and me, Miss Bodkin, your dear Whitfordians are as great rogues as the tradesmen in town, and vastly less pleasant to deal with. They make us pay an enormous percentage for the trifling credit we take. So let 'em wait and be——paid! Dear Minnie, I assure you I shall not forget your affectionate kindness."

He bent down over her as he said the last words, still holding her hands. A change in Minnie's face made him look round, and when he did so, he saw his wife standing just within the room behind him.

Minnie was inexpressibly vexed with herself to feel a hot flush covering her face. She knew it would be misconstrued, and that made her colour the more. Mrs. Algernon Errington was the first to speak.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bodkin," she said, "I didn't know that you were so particularly engaged."

"What the deuce brought you here?" asked her husband, with a not altogether successful assumption of thinking the whole trio, including himself, completely at their ease.

"There was no one in the drawing-room nor in the study," continued Castalia, still addressing Minnie, "so I thought I would come direct to your room. I see now that I ought not to have taken that liberty."

"Well, frankly, I don't think you ought, my dear," said her husband, lightly.

Minnie was sorely tempted to say so too. But she felt that any show of anger on her part would but increase the unpleasantness of the situation, and a quarrel with Algernon's wife under such circumstances would have been equally revolting to her pride and her taste; so she held out her hand to Castalia with grave courtesy, and said, "I have to apologise, on my side, for having taken the privilege of old friendship to sermonise your husband a little. He will tell you what I have ventured to speak to him about. I hope you will forgive me."

Castalia appeared not to see the proffered hand. She stood quite still near the door as she answered, "Oh, I daresay it is all quite right. I don't suppose Ancram will tell me anything about it; I am not in his secrets."

"This is no secret, Mrs. Errington; at all events, not from you."

"Oh, I don't know. But I daresay it doesn't matter."

Through all the languid insolence of her manner there was discernible so much real pain of mind, that Minnie once more checked a severe speech, and answered gently, "You will judge of that. Of course Algernon will discuss the subject of our conversation with you."

Mrs. Algernon Errington scarcely condescended to return Minnie's parting salutation, but walked away, saying to her husband over her shoulder, "I am going to drive home. It is nearly dinner-time. I suppose you are coming? But don't let me interfere with your arrangements."

"Interfere with a fiddlestick!" cried Algernon in the quick, testy tone that was the nearest approach to loss of temper Minnie had ever seen in him. Then he added after an instant, with a short laugh, "I don't know why I'm supposed not to include dinner in my 'arrangements' to-day of all days in the year!"

And then the husband and wife went away together, and entered the fly that awaited them before Dr. Bodkin's door.

"How did you know where to find me?" asked Algernon suddenly, after a silent drive of some ten minutes.

"Oh, I knew you had a rendezvous."

"I had no 'rendezvous.' You could not know it!"

"Couldn't I? I tell you I saw that creature's letter. 'Dear Algernon!' What right has she to write to you like that?"

And Castalia burst into angry tears.

Algernon turned upon her eagerly.

"Saw her letter? Where? How?"

"I —— they told me —— it was at the office."

"You went to the office? And you saw Minnie's letter?"

"I—it's no use scolding me, or pretending to be injured. I know who is injured of us two."

"I suppose I must have left the note lying open on the table of my office," said Algernon, speaking very distinctly, and not looking at his wife.

"Yes; that must be it! I—I—I tore it up. You will find the fragments on the floor if you think them worth preserving."

"What a goose you are, Castalia!" exclaimed her husband, leaning back in the carriage and closing his eyes.

Now, the fact was that Algernon distinctly remembered having placed Minnie's note in a drawer of a little secretaire which he kept habitually locked, and of which the key was at that moment in his waistcoat pocket. And the discovery that his wife

had in some way or other obtained access to the said secretaire gave him, for reasons known only to himself, abundant food for conjecture and reflection during the rest of the drive home.

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